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On Wealth and Wrongdoing: How Social Class Influences Unethical Behavior

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On Wealth and Wrongdoing: How Social Class Influences Unethical Behavior

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Abstract

On Wealth and Wrongdoing: How Social Class Influences Unethical Behavior

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Social class is an individual-level characteristic that reflects a person's objective material resources (e.g., income, education, and occupational prestige) *and* corresponding subjective perceptions of rank vis-à-vis others in the social hierarchy (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). Drawing on theories of cultural psychology and social cognition, emerging psychological research suggests that social class influences people's social and cognitive tendencies, significantly shaping how they perceive, interpret, and react to their environments (Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, in press; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010). Specifically, the confluence of increased resources and rank, greater personal control, decreased vulnerability to environmental threat, and increased independence from others gives rise to *self-focused* social cognitive tendencies among upper-class individuals. By contrast, the confluence of decreased resources and rank, less personal control, increased vulnerability to threat, and increased dependence on others gives rise to *other-focused* social cognitive tendencies among lower-class individuals. Following from this theoretical framework, I tested the hypothesis that upper-class individuals, relative to lower-class individuals, engage in increased unethical behavior, and do so, in part, because of their more favorable attitudes toward greed.

Seven studies using experimental and naturalistic methods yielded evidence that supported this hypothesis. In my first two studies, upper-class individuals proved more likely than lower-class individuals to break the law while driving by cutting off other vehicles at a four-way intersection (Study 1) or failing to yield for a pedestrian at a crosswalk (Study 2). Follow-up laboratory studies further tested the association between social class and unethical tendencies. In Study 3, upper-class individuals were more likely than lower-class individuals to exhibit unethical decision-making tendencies. In Study 4, inducing in participants an upper-class mindset caused them to take more valued goods from others compared to participants who experienced a lower-class mindset. In Study 5, upper-class individuals were more likely than lower-class individuals to endorse lying in a hypothetical negotiation. In Study 6, upper-class individuals were more likely than lower-class individuals to cheat in a game to increase their chances of winning a prize. Finally, in Study 7, upper-class individuals endorsed more unethical behavior at work than lower-class individuals. Across studies, I provide mediator and moderator data in support of the hypothesis that upper-class individuals' unethical tendencies are driven, in part, by their more favorable attitudes toward greed.

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On Wealth and Wrongdoing: How Social Class Influences Unethical Behavior

Social class exerts a pervasive influence on people's lives. From the macro to the minute, social class shapes a variety of social outcomes, including where people live, the schools they attend, the foods they consume, the activities they enjoy, and the places they worship (Bourdieu, 1984; Domhoff, 1998; Durkheim, 1933/1893; Fiske & Markus, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Marx & Engels, 1973/1848; Monsivias & Dowrensky, 2009; Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2011; Weber, 1958). Emerging psychological research finds that social class influences a variety of important psychological outcomes, including physical health (Adler et al., 1994; Gallo & Matthews, 2003), subjective well-being (Diener, Ng, Harter, & Arora, 2010), the self-concept (Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007), and aesthetic preferences (Snibbe & Markus, 2005). Social class significantly shapes people's thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Building on prior research documenting the psychological effects of social class, I examine how social class influences people's tendencies toward unethical behavior. Specifically, I explore the question: Which social class is the more likely provenance of unethical behavior—the upper class or the lower class? The role of social hierarchy in shaping ethical and moral judgment has been of long-standing interest to social scientists and philosophers (e.g., Marx, 1977/1867; Plato, 1987/380 B.C.). Moreover, in examining how social class is associated with unethical behavior, I hope to shed light on behaviors such as cheating, deception, or breaking the law that have important consequences for both the individual and society.

On the one hand, lower-class individuals live in environments defined by fewer resources, greater threat, and more uncertainty (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Piff, Stancato, Martinez, Kraus, & Keltner, 2012; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Moreover, ethical behavior can be costly, potentially directing resources away from the self toward others. The costs of ethical conduct may thus be greater among lower-class individuals. Given these considerations, it might stand to reason that lower-class individuals are more motivated to behave unethically to increase their resources or overcome their disadvantage.

A second line of reasoning, however, suggests the opposite prediction: namely, that the upper class may be more disposed to the unethical. Greater resources, freedom, and independence from others among the upper class give rise to self-focused social-cognitive tendencies (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010; Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Kraus, Piff & Keltner, 2009; 2011; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010), which may facilitate unethical behavior. Historical observation lends credence to this idea. For example, the recent economic crisis has been attributed in part to the unethical actions of the wealthy (Galperin, Bennett, & Aquino, 2011). Religious teachings extol the poor and admonish the rich with claims like, "It will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:23-24, King James Version). Building upon past findings, in the present investigation I test whether upper-class individuals, relative to lower-class individuals, are more likely to engage in unethical behavior, and whether their attitudes toward greed might help explain this tendency.

Social Class, Independence, and Self-Focus

Humans arrange themselves into hierarchies on numerous dimensions, including age, gender, physical dominance, group-level respect, and the capacity for power (e.g., Guinote & Vescio, 2010; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Social hierarchies are vertical and relational: they determine the individual's privileged access to resources and capacity for influence (e.g., Keltner, van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008). A distinct form of hierarchy, social class is an individual-level characteristic constituted by both the material conditions of a person's life (e.g.,

wealth, education, and occupation; Oakes & Rossi, 2003) and his/her corresponding subjective perceptions of rank vis-à-vis others (Adler et al., 2000; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011; Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, in press). These facets of social class shape the identities of upper- and lower-class individuals and, like other social identity constructs (e.g., ethnicity and nation of origin), influence an individual's life circumstances and patterns of social perception and construal. For example, social class can be a source of social stigma and rejection among individuals from lower-class backgrounds (Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011) and is a means by which individuals are categorized during social interactions (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001). Guided by this conceptualization of social class, emerging research documents how the distinct social and physical environments that characterize different social classes shape class-specific patterns of traits, cognition, and behavior (Kraus et al., 2009; Piff et al., 2010; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2007).

Abundant resources and elevated rank afford upper-class individuals increased control over their lives and reduced exposure to external influences (Johnson & Krueger, 2005, 2006; Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Kraus et al., 2009). Upper-class individuals tend to have occupations that involve more independence and control over others (Adler et al., 2000), and they experience increased geographic mobility, greater income, better physical health, and more choice (see Stephens et al., 2007). Moreover, upper-class parents are more likely to cultivate their children's individual accomplishments and talents, practices that give rise to an increased psychological sense of entitlement on the part of the child (Lareau, 2002). The confluence of increased resources and rank, greater personal control, and a reduced vulnerability to threat enable upper-class individuals to have increased freedom and independence from others, which give rise to self-focused patterns of social cognition and behavior—in other words, increased attention to the individual self (Kraus et al., 2011, in press; Piff et al., 2010).

By contrast, lower-class individuals have fewer material resources, reduced rank, and their lives—both objectively and in terms of subjective construal—are more vulnerable to external influences (Evans, 2004; Evans, Gonnella, Marcynyszyn, Gentile, & Salpekar, 2005; Kraus et al., 2009). Lower-class individuals are also more likely to spend time with family and engage in the caretaking of others (Argyle, 1994). Lower-class individuals have stronger extended family ties (Lareau, 2002) and are more embedded in social networks that depend on mutual relationships of reciprocal aid (e.g., Lamont, 2000). Decreased resources and rank, decreased personal control, and increased vulnerability to threat among lower-class individuals shape a vigilance to the social environment and greater dependence on others to achieve desired outcomes, both well-documented and adaptive strategies of lower-rank individuals navigating more unstable and challenging environments (e.g., Taylor et al., 2000). This confluence of processes gives rise to other-focused patterns of social cognition and behavior—in other words, increased attention to others and social relationships (Kraus et al., 2011; Piff et al., 2010; Piff, Stancato, Martinez, Kraus, & Keltner, 2012; Stephens et al., 2007).

There are numerous empirical demonstrations of class-related differences in other- versus self-focus. Relative to lower-class individuals, upper-class individuals have been shown to be more individualistic—focusing more on individual dispositions and characteristics—in their explanations of various social outcomes and less cognizant of others in their social environment (Kraus et al., 2009). Upper-class individuals are also less motivated than lower-class individuals to behave in ways that enhance social relationships. In interactions with strangers, upper-class individuals demonstrate greater impoliteness and disengagement, for instance checking their cell phones or doodling on a questionnaire, compared to their lower-class peers, whose non-verbal

styles involve more socially engaged eye contact, head nods, and laughs (Kraus & Keltner, 2009). Paralleling these findings, naturalistic observations of children's style of play find that upper-class children tend to play further away from other children, relative to their lower-class peers, who play in closer proximity to others (Scherer, 1974).

Related to this work on class and interpersonal engagement, studies find that upper-class individuals prefer to differentiate themselves from others, relative to lower-class individuals, who instead seek assimilation. For instance, a study by Stephens and colleagues (2007) found that when given a choice between pens that were more or less unique, individuals from upper-class contexts chose pens that were different from other pens in the set, whereas individuals from lower-class contexts tended to prefer pens that were similar to the other pens. Similar class-based differences in preferences for independence have been documented in other contexts, including individuals' affective experience of personal choice (Stephens et al., 2011). These studies indicate that higher social class is associated not only with decreased social engagement but also increased preferences for independence from others.

My conceptual analysis and the research I have reviewed converges on the claim that, relative to their lower-class counterparts, upper-class individuals are more self-focused and independent and less invested in their interactions. In the present investigation I test one overarching hypothesis that derives from this theoretical framework. Specifically, I examine whether upper-class individuals, more so than lower-class individuals, engage in increased unethical behavior.

Social Class, Greed, and Unethical behavior

Unethical or immoral behavior refers to actions that harm others and are illegal or morally objectionable to one's community or social group (for similar conceptualizations of unethical and immoral behavior, see Gino & Pierce, 2009; Shu, Gino, & Bazerman, 2011). Research finds that situational variables can significantly influence unethical tendencies. For example, unethical behavior is more likely to occur in organizations that lack explicit codes of conduct (Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010), among individuals with depleted self-control capabilities (Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, & Ariely, 2011; Mead, Baumeister, Gino, Schweitzer, & Ariely, 2009), or when situational norms violate one's default moral standards (Gino, Ayal, & Ariely, 2009). Complementing this work, a long line of research documents numerous individual-level characteristics that also shape unethical tendencies. For example, individuals who exhibit decreased moral reasoning ability, increased Machiavellianism, external (versus internal) locus of control, or greater moral relativism (versus idealism) all engage in increased unethical decision-making and behavior (for a review, see Kish-Gephart et al., 2010). Extending this prior work, I test whether social class—an individual-level characteristics rooted in objective resources and corresponding subjective perceptions of rank—exerts a unique and specific effect on unethical behavior.

Several lines of evidence lend support to the idea that social class is associated with unethical behavior and in ways that are in keeping with the hypothesis that upper-class individuals engage in increased unethical behavior compared to lower-class individuals. Research on social power finds that individuals with high power—reflecting their increased capacity to influence others' outcomes—are less sensitive to social disapproval, which leads to a relatively uninhibited pursuit of self-interest (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Powerful individuals are also more likely to engage in moral hypocrisy, for instance by condemning others' cheating while cheating more themselves (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010). In still other work, high-power individuals have been found to be more likely to commit acts of

infidelity in their romantic relationships (Lammers, Stoker, Jordan, Pollmann, & Stapel, 2011). Although social power and social class are conceptually and empirically distinct rank-based processes (Côté, 2011; Keltner et al., 2003; Kraus et al., 2011, in press), this research suggests that upper-class individuals may tend to overlook the interests of others while pursuing their own goals and engage in more unethical behavior.

Recent research on social class, empathy, and compassion lends further support to the hypothesis that higher social class is associated with increased unethical behavior. Findings associating social class with empathic accuracy—the ability to infer the emotional states and experiences of others—suggest that upper-class individuals are less able than lower-class individuals to accurately read others' emotions, for instance when decoding emotions displayed in static facial expressions (Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010). Related work finds that upper-class individuals are less compassionate. For instance, in one study, upper-class individuals exhibited decreased heart rate deceleration—a physiological response associated with compassion—to the suffering of others, relative to their lower-class, more compassionate counterparts (Stellar, Manzo, Kraus, & Keltner, in press). To the extent that upper-class individuals are less sensitive to others' feelings and well-being, they may prove more likely to engage in unethical actions that negatively impact others.

Upper-class individuals, despite having more material resources, also tend to be less prosocial, which may give rise to an increased propensity toward unethical behavior. In one study, upper-class individuals proved more selfish in an economic game, keeping significantly more laboratory credits—which they believed would later be exchanged for cash—than did lower-class participants, who shared more of their credits with a stranger (Piff et al., 2010). These results parallel nationwide survey data showing that upper-class households donate a smaller proportion of their incomes to charity than do lower-class households (Independent Sector, 2002). In another study, participants were given the opportunity to allocate a certain amount of their own time to help a distressed partner who, unbeknownst to them, was actually a confederate of the experiment. Relative to their lower-class counterparts, upper-class individuals proved significantly less willing to help (Piff et al., 2010). These findings suggest that upper-class individuals are particularly likely to value their own welfare over the welfare of others and, thus, may hold more positive attitudes toward greed, prioritizing the pursuit of self-interest over the well-being of others.

Greed, in turn, is a robust determinant of unethical behavior. Plato and Aristotle deemed greed to be at the root of personal immorality, arguing that greed drives desires for material gain at the expense of ethical standards (Shklar, 1990; Wang & Murnighan, 2011). Research finds that individuals motivated by greed tend to abandon moral principles in their pursuit of self-interest (Steinel & De Dreu, 2004). In one study, a financial incentive of $100 caused people to be more willing to deceive and cheat others for personal gain (Aquino, Freeman, Reed II, Lim, & Felps, 2009). Another study found that simply being in the presence of money led individuals to be more likely to cheat in an anagram task to receive a larger financial reward (Gino & Pierce, 2009). In other work, activating concepts associated with money (e.g., by simply handling money from a popular board game; Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006) or business (e.g., by viewing an image of a briefcase; Kay, Wheeler, Bargh, & Ross, 2004) caused participants to act in more self-focused and less generous ways. Greed leads to reduced concern for how one's behavior affects others and motivates greater unethical action. Insofar as upper-class individuals hold more favorable attitudes toward greed, they should prove more willing to engage in unethical behavior, even to the detriment of others' welfare.

Correlational studies of law breaking provide the most direct evidence in favor of my hypothesis. Nationwide surveys using representative samples of adults in the United States frequently find that upper-class individuals are more likely to break certain laws than lower-class individuals. For instance, in one survey of adult driving behavior (Shinar, Schechtman, & Compton, 2001), 66% of higher-income drivers and 64% of higher-educated drivers reported breaking the speed limit, whereas only 52% of lower-income drivers and 55% of lower-educated drivers reported doing so. A study of shoplifting behavior in the United States yielded converging results (Blanco et al., 2008). Specifically, reported incidence of shoplifting was highest among individuals with at least some college education, with incomes over $35,000, or with family incomes over $70,000. Although these results are primarily self-report and thus subject to alternative explanations, including the possibility that upper-class individuals are simply more honest about their infractions, this correlational evidence indicates that upper-class individuals may tend to be more unethical than their lower-class counterparts.

My conceptual analysis of social class and self- versus other-focus, and the findings I have reviewed on power, compassion, greed, and unethical behavior, set the stage for the hypothesis I test in the current investigation. Guided by prior work, I reason that increased resources and independence from others cause people to prioritize self-interest over others' welfare and perceive greed as positive and beneficial, which in turn gives rise to increased unethical behavior. I predict that, given their abundant resources and increased independence, upper-class individuals should demonstrate greater unethical behavior and that one important reason for this tendency is that upper-class individuals hold more favorable attitudes toward greed. That is, whereas lower-class individuals rely on the strength of their social bonds to cope and thus may adhere to socially accepted rules for behavior, upper-class individuals prioritize self-interest and, as a consequence, are more likely to abandon social rules and standards to enhance their own well-being.

The Present Research

I conducted seven studies using university, community, and nationwide samples to test the general prediction that upper-class individuals act in a more unethical fashion than their lower-class counterparts. Throughout this research, I sought to generalize my results across operationalizations of social class, including a cultural symbol of social class rank, assessments of subjective social class, and a manipulation of social class mindset. Across studies, I used both self-report and objective assessments of unethical behavior, and controlled for alternative explanations of the results concerned with characteristics related to social class (e.g., age, ethnicity, religiosity). In Studies 1 and 2, I tested whether higher social class is linked to more unethical behaviors in a naturalistic setting—behavior while driving. In Study 3, I tested the association between social class and the tendency to engage in unethical decision-making. In Study 4, I extended this research by examining whether experimentally-primed higher and lower social class mindsets would cause different levels of unethical judgment and behavior. In Study 5, I examined whether upper-class individuals are prone to deception and whether this tendency is in part due to their more favorable attitudes toward greed. In Study 6, I examined whether upper-class individuals were more likely to cheat in a game to increase their chances of winning a monetary prize partly because of their more favorable opinions of greed. Finally, in Study 7, I tested whether priming favorable attitudes toward greed would moderate the relationship between social class and unethical behavior, such that when primed with positive feelings about greed, lower-class individuals would be as prone to unethical behavior as their upper-class counterparts (see also Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012).

Study 1: Social Class and Unethical Driving at a Four-way Intersection

I first tested the relationship between social class and unethical behavior in a naturalistic setting by examining whether upper-class individuals behave more unethically than lower-class individuals while driving. As vehicles symbolize a person's social rank and wealth (Erk, Spitzer, Wunderlich, Galley, & Walter, 2002; Frank, 1999), I used vehicle status (make, age, and appearance) to index drivers' social class, and observed whether drivers of high-status vehicles were more likely to break the law at a four-way intersection.

Method

Participants. Coding of the driving behavior of 274 vehicles at a busy four-way intersection in the San Francisco Bay Area yielded the data to test my hypothesis. Vehicles were coded by two separate teams of coders between the hours of 3:00 pm and 6:00 pm on two consecutive Fridays in June, 2011.

Coding of social class. The primary independent variable in the current study was vehicle status, which served as my measure of the driver's social class. For each vehicle in the current study, a team of coders—blind to the hypotheses of the study—rated its perceived status (1 = *low status*, 5 = *high status*) by taking into account its make (e.g., Mercedes, Toyota), age, and physical appearance.

To verify that the coding of vehicle status was consistent and reliable, coders independently coded a set of 24 vehicles at a separate time and location from the main study. While coding each vehicle, the coders stood within proximity of one another but at a distance that prevented each coder's codes from being visible to the other coders. There was high agreement amongst the four coders for vehicle status ($\alpha = 0.95$).

Coding of driver unethical behavior. Coding of driving behavior took place at a four-way intersection with stop signs on all four sides. Coding sessions occurred during rush hour (3:00 pm to 6:00 pm), when successive lines of cars were waiting to cross the intersection from all sides, providing a rich context for observing driving behavior. During each coding session, two separate teams of two coders stationed themselves out of drivers' sight at opposite corners (facing opposite highways) of the intersection (see Fig. 1). Each team coded only vehicles approaching the intersection from the highway nearest to them. From their respective highway, each coding team selected a vehicle approaching the intersection in a quasi-random fashion and coded the characteristics of the vehicle and driver before it reached the stop sign. For each vehicle selected, coders rated its perceived status ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.07$). Once the selected vehicle came to a complete stop at the stop sign, coders observed whether or not the vehicle's driver cut in front of other vehicles already stopped at the intersection. A cut was defined in accordance with California Vehicle Code, which states that vehicles approaching an intersection should yield the right-of-way to any vehicle that has already arrived at the intersection from a different highway (California Department of Motor Vehicles, 2012). Drivers who failed to adhere to this rule—by crossing the intersection before it was their proper turn and preventing other drivers from rightfully crossing—were recorded as having cut off other vehicles at the intersection (0 = *no cut*, 1 = *cut*). This variable served as our measure of unethical behavior, as failing to yield to other vehicles that have the right-of-way violates both social norms and driving regulations. All vehicle codes were agreed upon by both members of each coding team. To reduce coding demands, only one coder recorded the data as their partner dictated the pertinent information. Thus, each coding team produced one set of agreed-upon codes. Once the data for a

particular vehicle had been recorded, coders selected another vehicle to code from the line of oncoming traffic, taking care to sample from low-, mid-, and high-status vehicles.

Coding of control variables. In testing the association between vehicle status and driver behavior, I also sought to account for several additional factors that might influence the results. Thus, for each vehicle observed, coders also noted the vehicle driver's perceived gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*; 175 female, 99 male) and age (1 = *16-35 years*, 2 = *36-55 years*, 3 = *56 years and up*; $M = 1.70$, $SD = 0.59$), the time of day (M = 3:40 pm, SD = 38 minutes), and—to index amount of traffic—the number of highways in the intersection with vehicles already stopped in them when the target vehicle arrived at the intersection. A maximum of three other highways could be coded as having cars in them ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.50$). In the same coding validation procedure described above, I verified that coders' perceptions of driver gender ($\alpha = 0.98$) and driver age ($\alpha = 0.87$) were consistent and reliable.

Results and Discussion

34 (12.4%) of the 274 vehicles cut in front of other vehicles by crossing the intersection before it was their rightful turn. The focus of the current study was whether upper-class drivers—as indexed by their high-status vehicles—would be more likely than lower-class drivers (driving low-status vehicles) to cut off other drivers. I tested this using a binary logistic framework, with vehicle status as the independent variable and whether or not the driver cut as the dependent variable. I simultaneously entered time of day, driver's gender and age, and the number of highways full when the vehicle arrived at the intersection as covariates. As hypothesized, vehicle status positively predicted cutting behavior ($b = 0.36$, $p < 0.05$; without covariates entered, $b = 0.37$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that upper-class drivers were more likely than lower-class drivers to cut in front of other drivers. Percentages of cars that cut off other vehicles as a function of vehicle status are shown in Fig. 2A. The left hand columns of Table 1 display the proportion of vehicles that cut as a function of vehicle status in Study 1. Zero-order and partial correlations between vehicle status and cutting off other vehicles are shown in Table 2.

Study 2: Social Class and Unethical Driving Behavior at a Crosswalk

Study 2 sought to extend these initial findings to a new naturalistic setting and tested whether upper-class drivers are more likely to cut off pedestrians at a crosswalk. A coder positioned him/herself out of plain sight at the crosswalk, coded the status of a vehicle, and recorded whether the driver yielded to a pedestrian standing at the edge of the crosswalk waiting to cross. I hypothesized that drivers of high-status vehicles would be significantly less likely to yield for a pedestrian, and thus more likely to violate vehicle code, relative to drivers of low-status vehicles.

Method

Participants. The driving behavior of 152 vehicles that approached a pedestrian crosswalk of a busy throughway in the San Francisco Bay Area provided the data for the current study. Vehicles were coded from approximately 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm on three separate weekdays during the month of June, 2011.

Coding of social class. The primary independent variable in the current study was vehicle status. As in Study 1, a coder—blind to the hypotheses of the study—rated a vehicle's perceived expensiveness and status (1 = *low status*, 5 = *high status*) by taking into account its make, age, and physical appearance.

Coding of driver unethical behavior. Coding took place at an unprotected but marked pedestrian crosswalk of a busy one-way road near a major public university. A coder positioned

him/herself near the crosswalk, beyond drivers' direct line of sight, and recorded whether an approaching vehicle yielded for a pedestrian—a confederate of the study—who was waiting to cross (a photo series depicting the procedure is presented in Fig. 3). Gender of the confederate was alternated. The coder first noted the perceived status of the vehicle (M = 3.22, SD = 0.96) and then observed whether the driver yielded the right-of-way or cut off the pedestrian (0 = *yield*, 1 = *cut*), which served as the current measure of unethical behavior. A cut was defined in accordance with California Vehicle Code: A driver must yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian crossing the roadway within any marked crosswalk (California Department of Motor Vehicles, 2012). If a vehicle yielded for the pedestrian, the pedestrian proceeded to cross the crosswalk, only crossing back when the driver was out of sight to prepare for the coding of another vehicle.

I held constant a number of factors that might otherwise confound the results. First, I only coded vehicles in the lane closest to the pedestrian, as these vehicles would be the most likely to perceive the pedestrian and yield the right-of-way. Second, only vehicles that approached the crosswalk when the confederate was the sole pedestrian were coded, thus keeping constant the number of pedestrians at the crosswalk for each coded vehicle. Third, only after a vehicle crossed a designated point on the road approximately 15 meters from the crosswalk did the pedestrian enter the beginning of the crosswalk and look toward the oncoming vehicle, thereby signaling his/her intent to cross. This helped ensure that all coded drivers had a comparable opportunity to perceive and identify the confederate as a pedestrian. Fourth, a vehicle was only coded if there were no other vehicles in front of it when it passed the designated point on the road. This reduced the possibility that drivers were influenced by the behavior of vehicles ahead of them on the motorway.

Coding of control variables. I also sought to control for several factors that might influence my findings. Thus, in addition to coding the status of each vehicle, coders also noted the vehicle driver's gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*; 72 female, 80 male) and age (1 = *16-35 years*, 2 = *36-55 years*, 3 = *56 years and up*; M = 1.66, SD = 0.69); the time of day (M = 3:12 pm, SD = 49 minutes); whether the driver indicated having seen the pedestrian by directing his/her gaze toward the pedestrian or briefly decelerating (all drivers were coded as having seen the pedestrian); and the gender of the confederate posing as a pedestrian when the vehicle approached the crosswalk (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*; 49 female, 103 male).

Results and Discussion

53 (34.9%) of the 152 vehicles failed to yield to the pedestrian. The central focus of the current study was whether upper-class drivers would be more likely than lower-class drivers to cut off the pedestrian. I tested this prediction using a binary logistic framework, with vehicle status entered as the predictor and whether or not the driver cut off the pedestrian as the dependent variable. I simultaneously entered time of day, driver's age and gender, and pedestrian gender as covariates. Gender of pedestrian was a significant predictor of cutting (b = -0.96, p < 0.03), suggesting that drivers were more likely to cut off male rather than female pedestrians. Central to my predictions, vehicle status positively and significantly predicted cutting off the pedestrian (b = 0.39, p < 0.05; without covariates entered, b = 0.41, p < 0.03). These results indicate that upper-class drivers were significantly more likely to cut off a pedestrian than were lower-class drivers. Percentages of cars that cut off the pedestrian as a function of vehicle status are shown in Fig. 2B. The right hand columns of Table 1 display the proportion of vehicles that cut off the pedestrian as a function of vehicle status in Study 2. Zero-order and partial correlations between vehicle status and cutting off the pedestrian are shown in Table 3.

Study 3: Social Class Predicts Unethical Decision-making Tendencies

Whereas the prior two studies used an indirect measure of social class (vehicle status) to assess unethical behavior in a naturalistic setting, Study 3 used a more direct measure of social class and assessed tendencies toward a variety of unethical decisions. I predicted that participants belonging to higher social classes would report increased unethical tendencies.

Method

Participants. 105 participants (43 female) were recruited from a major public university campus and received partial course credit in exchange for participation. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 36 (M = 20.33, SD = 2.52). 37 participants were European American, 50 were Asian American, and 32 participants were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity. The sum of these categories exceeds 129 because some participants listed more than one ethnic category (similarly, as participants could choose more than one ethnicity across studies, the sum of categories could exceed the total number of participants). Given that European Americans are the ethnic majority in the United States (United States Census, 2010) and were the largest represented ethnic category in the majority of the current studies, and to parallel precedent in prior social class research (Kraus et al., 2009; Piff et al., 2010), in Study 3, as in subsequent studies, ethnicity was coded as 1 = *European-American* and 0 = *non-European American*. I repeated the analyses with two different coding schemes, one contrasting Asians to non-Asians (1 = *Asian* and 0 = *non-Asian*), given past findings that Asians are more modest in their self-reports relative to non-Asians (Nisbett, 2004), and one with a dummy code for each ethnic category represented (with European-American as the comparison category), and the results in Study 3 and subsequent studies were virtually the same.

Procedure. Participants accessed the study via a private computer terminal and took part in several filler measures before completing a measure of unethical decision-making tendencies (Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008). Participants were presented with eight hypothetical scenarios in which an unethical behavior was described. Participants were instructed to imagine as vividly as possible that they were in each situation acting out the behaviors, as doing so would allow them to better predict how they would behave, and that being able to make such predictions is very important. The majority of the scenarios implicate the actor in unrightfully taking or benefiting from something. For example, one of the scenarios reads, "You've waited in line for 10 minutes to buy a coffee and muffin at Starbucks. When you're a couple of blocks away, you realize that the clerk gave you change for $20 rather than for the $10 you gave him. You savor your coffee, muffin, and free $10." For each of these scenarios, participants were asked to rate how likely it would be that he/she would engage in the behavior described on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all likely,* 7 = *highly likely*). Responses to the eight scenarios were summed and averaged (M = 4.39, SD = 1.08, α = 0.68).

This measure of ethical decision-making tendencies has been validated in several ways in past research (Detert et al., 2008). First, business ethics experts agreed that the behaviors described in the eight scenarios violated ethical principles. Second, scores on the measure were correlated with reports of having actually engaged in several other unethical behaviors, such as exaggerating accomplishments and taking money from others. Finally, individuals with higher scores on the measure were more likely to keep $8 that they were mailed, ostensibly by mistake, for completing a survey that they had not completed, relative to those with lower scores.

Participants also completed demographics, including the measure of social class: the MacArthur Scale of subjective socioeconomic status (SES; Adler et al., 2000; Kraus et al.,

2009). In this measure, participants are presented with a figure of a ladder containing 10 rungs representing people with different levels of education, income, and occupational prestige. Participants are asked to think of people at the top of the ladder as "those who are the best off, have the most money, most education, and best jobs," whereas the people at the bottom of the ladder were "those who are the worst off, have the least money, least education, and worst jobs or no job." Participants then select a rung that represents where they feel they stand relative to others ($M = 6.30$, $SD = 1.72$). This measure parallels objective, resource-based measures of social class in its relationship to health (Adler et al., 2000), social cognition (Kraus et al., 2009), and interpersonal behavior (Piff et al., 2010). Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results and Discussion

To test whether upper-class individuals reported more unethical tendencies relative to lower-class individuals, I regressed the measure of unethical decision-making tendencies onto social class, while accounting for participant age, gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*), and ethnicity (0 = *non-European American*, 1 = *European American*). As hypothesized, social class positively predicted unethical decision-making tendencies, even after controlling for ethnicity, gender, and age, $b = 0.13$, $SE\ b = 0.06$, $t(103) = 2.05$, $p < 0.04$. These results suggest that upper-class individuals are more likely to exhibit tendencies to act unethically compared to lower-class individuals. Zero-order and partial correlations between social class and unethical decision-making are shown in Table 4.

Study 4: Manipulation of Social Class Rank Makes People Take From Others

In Study 4 I sought to provide causal evidence for the effects of social class on unethical decision-making and behavior. Specifically, I tested whether the experience of higher social class has a direct effect on a person's subsequent unethical behavior. I adopted a paradigm used in past research to activate higher or lower social class mindsets and examine their effects on behavior (Kraus et al., 2010; Piff et al., 2010). I hypothesized that participants who temporarily experienced a higher social class mindset would engage in increased unethical behavior, relative to participants who experienced a lower social class mindset.

Method

Participants. 129 participants (85 female) were recruited from a major public university campus and received partial course credit in exchange for participation. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 27 ($M = 20.07$, $SD = 1.67$). 34 participants were European American, 73 were Asian American, and 34 participants were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (one unreported).

Procedure. Participants accessed the survey via a private computer terminal and completed the manipulation of social class rank. Participants were presented with an image of a ladder with 10 rungs and instructed to "Think of the ladder as representing where people stand in the United States." Participants were then randomly assigned to the cells of a 2-level single factor (Manipulated social class rank: lower vs. upper), between-subjects design, in which they experienced either low or high relative social class rank based on the following instructions:

> Now please compare yourself to the people at the very bottom (top) of the ladder. These are people who are the worst (best) off—those who have the least (most) money, least (most) education, and the least (most) respected jobs. In particular, we'd like you to think about how you are different from these people in terms of your own income, educational history, and job status. Where would you place yourself on this ladder relative to these people at the very bottom (top)?

Participants placed themselves on the ladder relative to people at the very top or bottom (10 = *top rung*, 1 = *bottom rung*) and were asked to imagine themselves in a "getting acquainted interaction with one of the people you just thought about from the ladder above." Participants were further instructed to think about "how the differences between you" might impact the interaction, and to write a brief description of how they thought the interaction might go. This induction primes subjective perceptions of relatively high or low social class rank by causing participants to think about themselves in relation to higher- or lower-ranking individuals. In this prior research, as expected, manipulations of perceived social class rank influenced generosity (Piff et al., 2010) and the ability to identify others' emotions (Kraus et al., 2010).

After the manipulation, participants completed a filler task, which was followed by the measure of unethical decision-making tendencies used in Study 3 (Detert et al., 2008). Responses to the eight scenarios were summed and averaged, with higher scores indicating increased unethical decision-making tendencies ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.97$, $\alpha = 0.66$). Following the measure of unethical decision-making tendencies, participants completed demographics before being directed by the computer to notify the experimenter, who was seated outside in the hall. The experimenter (who was blind to participants' condition) asked the participants to wait in the hall as the experimenter set up the second part of the study. At this time, the experimenter also presented participants with a jar of individually wrapped candies that, participants were told, were intended for children participating in studies in a nearby lab. The experimenter told participants that they could take some if they wanted. Participants were thus led to believe that the more candy they took for themselves, the less would be available for the children. The jar was kept approximately two-thirds full for all sessions (containing approximately 40 pieces of candy). To bolster experimental realism, the jar was also labeled with the name of the specific child-research lab and a note stating that it was to be taken to the faculty director of the lab. The experimenter then left the participants alone with the candy jar for approximately 30 seconds to set up the second part of the study. Participants then reentered the lab and completed some unrelated tasks on the computer before a final screen asked participants to indicate how many pieces of candy they had taken ($M = 0.91$, $SD = 1.05$). This task was adapted from prior research on entitlement (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004) and served as our measure of unethical behavior because, by taking candy, participants would be reducing the amount that would otherwise be given to children. Lastly, participants completed a funnel debriefing (Chartrand & Bargh, 1996). No participant was suspicious of the social class rank manipulation or purpose of the experiment.

Results and Discussion

As expected, participants in the upper-class rank condition ($M = 6.96$), who compared themselves to individuals at the bottom of the ladder, placed themselves significantly above participants in the lower-class rank condition ($M = 6.00$), who compared themselves to individuals at the top of the ladder, $t(127) = 3.51$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.62$. These results indicate that the manipulation successfully induced in participants a subjective sense of higher versus lower social class rank.

I next tested whether participants experimentally induced to feel elevated social class rank would engage in increased unethical behavior, relative to lower-ranking participants. Central to my hypothesis, participants in the upper-class rank condition took more candy that would otherwise go to children ($M = 1.17$) than did those in the lower-rank condition ($M = 0.60$), $t(124) = 3.18$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.57$. Further, replicating the findings from Study 3, those in the

upper-rank condition also reported increased unethical decision-making tendencies ($M = 4.29$) than participants in the lower-class rank condition ($M = 3.90$), $t(125) = 2.31$, $p < 0.03$, $d = 0.41$. These results extend the findings of Studies 1-3 by suggesting that the experience of higher social class has a causal relationship to unethical decision-making and behavior.

Study 5: Greed Mediates the Relationship Between Social Class and Lying

In Study 5, I began to examine why people from upper-class backgrounds behave in a more unethical fashion, focusing on positive attitudes towards greed as one explanatory mechanism. Participants took part in a hypothetical negotiation that effectively pitted a desire to enhance one's self-interest against a desire to be honest and fair toward a partner. I hypothesized that upper-class individuals would be more likely than lower-class individuals to endorse lying in the negotiation, and that upper-class individuals' tendency toward deception would be explained by their more favorable attitudes toward greed.

Method

Participants. 108 adults were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a website that features a diverse nationwide participant pool for online data collection (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Participants (61 female, one unreported) ranged in age from 18 to 82 ($M = 35.87$, $SD = 13.62$), with a mean degree of religiosity (1 = *not at all religious*, 7 = *deeply religious*) of 3.45 ($SD = 2.09$) and mean political orientation (1 = *extremely liberal*, 7 = *extremely conservative*) of 3.76 ($SD = 1.69$). 80 participants were European American, 14 were Asian American, and 25 participants were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity.

Procedure. Participants accessed the study via a survey link and were presented with the instructions for a hypothetical negotiation (Aquino et al., 2009). Participants imagined that they were an employer for a company in a salary negotiation with a job candidate and that the president of the company had asked them to negotiate as low a salary as possible. Participants were provided with several additional pieces of information. First, participants were informed that the position was certain to be eliminated in 6 months but that the candidate did not know this. Second, they were told that the candidate desired to maintain the job for at least 2 years and would accept a lower salary in exchange for a verbal commitment of job stability. Third, participants were informed that there were no other qualified candidates being considered but that the candidate was unaware of this. Fourth, participants were told that a failure to fill the position would negatively impact their yearly performance review, and they would receive an end-of-year bonus if they were able to negotiate a salary below a certain amount. After reading the instructions, participants were asked, "What is the percentage chance that you will tell the job candidate that the position is certain to be eliminated in 6 months if she/he specifically asks about job security?" (Aquino et al., 2009). Participants responded by clicking and dragging a slider to a value between 0% and 100% to indicate the percentage chance that they would tell the candidate the truth ($M = 62.30$, $SD = 31.03$).

Next, participants completed demographics, including the MacArthur Scale of subjective SES to index social class (Adler et al., 2000; $M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.65$). Finally, participants completed a measure of attitudes toward greed (Yamagishi & Sato, 1986), where they rated their agreement with seven items that assessed the extent to which they endorsed beliefs that greed is justified, beneficial, and moral. Sample items include, "It is not morally bad to think first of one's own benefit and not other people's," and "One should be concerned with the benefit to the group as a whole rather than with one's own benefit" (reversed). Items were summed and

averaged to index attitudes toward greed (M = 3.67, SD = 0.80, α = 0.61). Participants were thanked and debriefed before exiting the study.

Results and Discussion

I first tested the associations between social class, attitudes toward greed, and probability of telling the job candidate the truth, while accounting for participant age, gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*), and ethnicity (0 = *non-European American*, 1 = *European American*), as well as religiosity and political orientation—variables that can influence unethical behavior (Kennedy & Lawton, 1998). Social class negatively predicted probability of telling the truth, b = -4.55, $SE\ b$ = 1.90, $t(103)$ = -2.39, $p < 0.02$, and positively predicted favorable attitudes toward greed, b = 0.16, $SE\ b$ = 0.04, $t(103)$ = 3.54, $p < 0.01$. In addition, favorable attitudes toward greed negatively predicted probability of telling the truth, b = -12.29, $SE\ b$ = 3.93, $t(100)$ = -3.12, $p < 0.01$. Testing my mediational model, when social class and attitudes toward greed were entered into a linear regression model predicting probability of telling the job candidate the truth, social class was no longer significant, b = -2.43, $SE\ b$ = 1.87; $t(101)$ = -1.30, p = 0.20, whereas attitudes toward greed were a significant predictor, b = -11.41, $SE\ b$ = 3.81; $t(101)$ = -3.00, $p < 0.01$. Using the bootstrapping method (with 10,000 iterations) recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), I tested the significance of the indirect effect of social class on probability of telling the truth through attitudes toward greed. The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero (range: -3.7356 to -.6405). These findings suggest that upper-class individuals are prone to deception partly because they view greed in a more positive light. Zero-order and partial correlations between social class, attitudes toward greed, and probability of telling the truth are shown in Table 5.

Study 6: Greed Mediates the Relationship Between Social Class and Cheating

In Study 6, I extended these findings to actual cheating behavior. Participants played a game in which they were told that higher scores would equal better chances of winning a cash prize, but unbeknownst to them, the game had been rigged such that scores above a certain amount were impossible. Assessing the discrepancy between participants' reported and actual score allowed me to measure cheating behavior. I hypothesized that upper-class individuals would engage in more cheating and that this tendency would be explained by their more favorable attitudes toward greed.

Method

Participants. I recruited 195 adults via advertisement posted in the Volunteers section of Craigslist to participate in the study in exchange for being entered into a prize drawing for a $50 gift certificate toward an online retailer. Participants (129 female, six unreported) ranged in age from 18 to 74 (M = 33.82, SD = 13.26). The mean degree of religiosity (1 = *not at all religious*, 7 = *deeply religious*) in the sample was 3.41 (SD = 2.00) and mean political orientation (1 = *extremely liberal*, 7 = *extremely conservative*) was 3.14 (SD = 1.54). 141 participants were European American, 17 were Asian American, and 63 participants were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (two unreported).

Design and procedure. Participants took part in a "Game of Chance" in which they were told that the survey software would "roll" a die for them five times, each time randomly displaying one side of a six-sided die. Participants were informed that for every five points rolled, they would be awarded one extra credit (in addition to the one received for their participation) toward the $50 prize drawing, and that remaining points would be rounded up or down to the nearest multiple of five. Participants were further instructed that because the

experimenters had no way of ascertaining their individual rolls, they would have to keep track of their rolls themselves and report their total for all five rolls at the end of the game. In fact, the "rolling" of the die was pre-determined such that all participants received a 3 on their first roll, a 1 on their second, a 2 on their third, a 2 on their fourth, and a 4 on their fifth (totaling a score of 12, or two extra credits, with two leftover points). My measure of cheating was the extent to which a participant's reported total exceeded 12. In the current study, 31 participants reported total rolls exceeding 12, and the average amount of cheating was $M = 0.85$ ($SD = 2.78$).

After playing the game, participants completed various self-report measures, including the McArthur Scale of subjective SES to index social class (Adler et al., 2000; $M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.91$) and the seven-item measure of attitudes toward greed used in Study 5 (Yamagishi & Sato, 1986; $M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.74$, $\alpha = 0.52$). Participants were thanked and debriefed before exiting the study.

Results and Discussion

I predicted that upper-class individuals would be more likely than lower-class individuals to cheat in the game by reporting total rolls exceeding 12, and that more favorable attitudes toward greed among the upper class would mediate this effect. Controlling for participant age, gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*), ethnicity (0 = *non-European American*, 1 = *European American*), religiosity, and political orientation, social class positively predicted cheating, $b = 0.22$, $SE\ b = 0.11$, $t(181) = 1.98$, $p < 0.05$, and more favorable attitudes toward greed, $b = 0.06$, $SE\ b = 0.03$, $t(186) = 2.22$, $p < 0.03$. In addition, attitudes toward greed predicted cheating behavior, $b = 0.61$, $SE\ b = 0.29$, $t(180) = 2.36$, $p < 0.02$. When social class and attitudes toward greed were entered into a linear regression model predicting cheating behavior, social class was no longer a significant predictor, $b = 0.16$, $SE\ b = 0.11$, $t(185) = 1.50$, $p = 0.14$, whereas attitudes toward greed significantly predicted cheating, $b = 0.68$, $SE\ b = 0.27$, $t(185) = 2.50$, $p < 0.02$. The Preacher and Hayes (2008) bootstrapping technique (with 10,000 iterations) produced a 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect that did not include zero (range: .0005 to .3821). These results further suggest that more favorable attitudes toward greed among members of the upper class explain, in part, their unethical tendencies. Zero-order and partial correlations between social class, attitudes toward greed, and cheating behavior are shown in Table 6.

Study 7: Greed Moderates the Relationship between Social Class and Unethical Behavior

To further understand why upper-class individuals act more unethically, Study 7 examined whether encouraging positive attitudes toward greed increases the unethical tendencies of lower-class individuals to match those of their upper-class counterparts. When the benefits of greed were not mentioned, I expected that upper-class individuals would display increased unethical tendencies compared to lower-class individuals, as in the previous studies. However, when the benefits of greed were emphasized, I expected lower-class individuals to be as prone to unethical behavior as upper-class individuals. These findings would reveal that one reason why lower-class individuals tend to act more ethically is that they hold relatively unfavorable attitudes toward greed (and, conversely, that one reason why upper-class individuals tend to act more unethically is that they hold relatively favorable attitudes toward greed).

Method

Participants. I recruited 90 participants via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants (53 female, one unreported) ranged in age from 15 to 79 ($M = 34.97$, $SD = 13.58$), and reported a mean degree of religiosity (1 = *not at all religious*, 7 = *deeply religious*) of 3.56 ($SD = 1.09$) and mean political orientation (1 = *extremely liberal*, 7 = *extremely conservative*) of

3.48 (*SD* = 1.73). 70 participants were European American, 7 were Asian American, and 20 participants were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity.

Procedure. Participants accessed the study via a survey link and were randomly assigned to one of two priming conditions. In the greed-is-good priming condition, participants were instructed to think of ways in which greed could be beneficial. Participants were told that being greedy and pursuing their self-interest could, for example, allow them to be successful and achieve their professional goals. Participants were then asked to list three additional ways in which greed could be positive. In the neutral prime condition, participants were instructed to think of activities they did during an average day, such as going to work or spending time at the gym, and proceeded to list three such activities.

Participants also completed a manipulation check, which consisted of five items assessing their positive beliefs about greed (Wang, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2011). Sample items include, "Overall, greed is good," "It is bad to be greedy" (reversed), and "I should be greedy" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; $M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.26$, $\alpha = 0.92$). Participants then completed the measure of unethical behavior: a 12-item subset of the Propensity to Engage in Unethical Behavior scale (Chen & Tang, 2006). This measure presented participants with a list of hypothetical vignettes at work. Each vignette referred to a particular domain of unethical behavior, including resource abuse (e.g., making personal long-distance phone calls at work), theft (e.g., taking merchandise/cash from one's place of work), corruption (e.g., receiving bribes from others due to one's position), and deception (e.g., overcharging customers to increase sales and earn a higher bonus). Participants were asked to indicate how likely they would be to engage in each behavior using a 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*) Likert scale. Responses across the 12 vignettes were summed and averaged to create a reliable index of the propensity for unethical behavior ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 0.97$, $\alpha = 0.89$).

After completing the measure of unethical behavior, participants completed demographics, including the McArthur scale of subjective SES to index social class (Adler et al., 2000; $M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.77$). Finally, participants were debriefed before exiting the study.

Results and Discussion

As expected, participants primed with positive features of greed expressed more favorable attitudes toward greed ($M = 3.12$) compared to participants in the neutral-prime condition ($M = 2.42$), $t(87) = 2.72$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.58$. My central prediction was that the manipulation of attitudes toward greed would moderate the relationship between social class and unethical behavior. To test this, I regressed the measure of unethical behavior on social class, the greed manipulation, and their interaction, while controlling for age, ethnicity (0 = *non-European American*, 1 = *European American*), gender (0 = *female*, 1 = *male*), religiosity, and political orientation. Results yielded a significant effect for social class, such that upper-class participants reported more unethical behavior than lower-class participants, $b = 0.13$, $t(84) = 2.00$, $p < 0.05$. The analysis also yielded a significant effect for the greed manipulation, such that participants primed with positive features of greed reported more unethical behavior than neutral-primed participants, $b = 0.38$, $t(84) = 2.18$, $p < 0.04$. In addition, gender, $b = 0.46$, $t(84) = 2.49$, $p < 0.02$, and age, $b = -0.03$, $t(84) = -4.09$, $p < 0.01$, were significantly related to unethical behavior, but ethnicity, religiosity, or political orientation were not (ps > .18). These effects were qualified by the predicted significant interaction between social class and the greed manipulation, $b = -0.24$, $t(84) = -2.34$, $p < 0.03$. In the neutral prime condition, upper-class participants reported significantly more unethical behavior relative to lower-class participants, $t(45) = 2.04$, $p < 0.05$.

However, when participants were primed with positive aspects of greed, lower-class participants exhibited high levels of unethical behavior comparable to their upper-class counterparts, $t(38) = -1.42$, $p = 0.17$.

Together, the findings I observed in Study 7 indicate that priming the positive features of greed moderates class-based differences in unethical behavior. Importantly, lower-class individuals were as prone to unethical behavior as upper-class individuals when instructed to think of greed's benefits, suggesting that upper- and lower-class individuals do not necessarily differ in terms of their *capacity* for unethical behavior but rather in terms of their default *tendencies* toward it.

General Discussion

Corporate scandals, ponzi schemes, tax fraud, academic cheating, deception in relationships, and driving violations reveal an important truth: unethical behavior is an inescapable part of life. A robust psychological literature attests to the many factors that contribute to people's tendencies to behave unethically; factors as wide-ranging as gender, locus of control, and creativity can all play a role (Gino & Ariely, 2012; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010). Building on this rich and varied empirical tradition, in the current investigation I tested the influence of social class on unethical behavior.

Across seven studies, individuals from upper-class backgrounds behaved more unethically in both naturalistic and laboratory settings, relative to individuals from lower-class backgrounds. In field studies of driving behavior, upper-class drivers were significantly more likely to violate vehicle code by improperly cutting off other cars (Study 1) or failing to yield for pedestrians (Study 2). Upper-class individuals also engaged in increased unethical decision-making tendencies (Study 3). Inducing in participants the experience of higher social class caused them to exhibit increased unethical tendencies and behavior (Study 4). Upper-class individuals were also more likely to endorse deception in a negotiation (Study 5), cheat in a game to improve their chances of winning a prize (Study 6), and endorse unethical behavior at work (Study 7). Upper-class individuals, despite their increased resources and rank, are more likely than their lower-class counterparts to engage in unethical behavior.

My confidence in these findings is bolstered by their consistency across operationalizations of social class, including a material symbol of social class identity (one's vehicle), assessments of subjective SES, and a manipulation of relative social class rank—results that point to a psychological dimension to higher social class that gives rise to unethical action. Moreover, findings generalized across self-report and objective assessments of unethical behavior; in university, community, and nationwide samples; and while holding constant several variables that co-vary with social class and could confound my results (e.g., ethnicity, political orientation, religiosity).

Why are upper-class individuals more prone to unethical behavior, from violating traffic codes to taking public goods to lying? In the present research I focused on a values account, documenting how upper-class individuals' more favorable attitudes toward greed can help explain their propensity toward unethical behavior. As hypothesized, upper-class individuals' more favorable attitudes toward greed accounted for their increased tendencies toward deception (Study 5) and cheating (Study 6). Moreover, temporarily inducing in lower-class individuals more favorable attitudes toward greed caused them to endorse high levels of unethical behavior that rivaled those of their upper-class peers (Study 7). These mediator and moderator data suggest that attitudes toward greed help drive class differences in unethical behavior.

Despite the process data I provide, it is important to note that the relationship between social class and unethical behavior is certain to be a multiply determined effect involving both structural and psychological factors. Upper-class individuals' relative independence in their social lives and increased freedom from interference of others in their professions (Kraus et al., 2011) may provide fewer structural constraints and decreased perceptions of risk associated with committing unethical acts (Galperin et al., 2011). The availability of resources to deal with the downstream costs of unethical behavior may increase the likelihood of such acts among the upper class. In addition, independent self-construals and feelings of entitlement among the upper class (Snibbe & Markus, 2005) may shape inattention to the consequences of one's actions on others (Fiske, 1993). A reduced concern for others' evaluations (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008; Kraus et al., in press) and increased goal-focus (Guinote, 2007) could further instigate unethical tendencies among upper-class individuals. Moreover, upper-class individuals may feel more inclined to rationalize and justify their behavior, which, in turn, leads to unethical behavior (Gino & Ariely, 2012). Together, these factors may give rise to a set of culturally shared norms among upper-class individuals that facilitates unethical behavior.

Favorable attitudes toward greed among the upper class are likely to be themselves multiply determined as well. Prior work shows that increased resources, freedom, and reduced dependency on others shape self-focused social-cognitive tendencies (Kraus et al., 2011, in press; Kraus & Keltner 2009; Piff et al., 2010), which may give rise to social values that emphasize greed as positive. Other situational forces may also influence positive views toward greed among the upper class. Economics education, with its focus on competition and self-interest maximization, may lead people to view greed as positive and beneficial (Frank, Gilovich, & Regan, 1993; Wang et al., 2011). Upper-class individuals, who may be more likely to serve as managers and leaders in their organizations (Adler et al., 2000), may also be more likely to have received economics-oriented training and to work in professional settings that hone self-interest. These factors may promote values among the upper class that justify and even moralize positive beliefs about greed.

Limitations and Future Directions

An emerging literature in psychology argues that the distinct ecologies associated with different social class groups shape social and cognitive tendencies in significant ways (Kraus et al., 2009, 2011, in press; Piff et al., 2010; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2007). In particular, the confluence of increased resources and rank, greater personal control, a reduced vulnerability to threat, and greater independence from others shape self-focused social-cognitive tendencies among upper-class individuals. By contrast, decreased resources and rank, decreased personal control, increased vulnerability to threat, and greater dependence on others shape other-focused social-cognitive tendencies among lower-class individuals. The results from the present investigation dovetail with this prior work and expand upon it in important ways. Specifically, my findings show that the self- versus other-focused patterns exhibited by upper- and lower-class individuals, respectively, extend to their tendencies to engage in unethical behavior, break rules, and even harm others in their pursuit of self-interest.

The current findings should be interpreted within the confines of certain caveats and with suggested directions for future research. Importantly, there are likely to be exceptions to the trends I document in the current investigation. There are notable cases of ethical action among upper-class individuals that greatly benefited the greater good. Examples include whistle-blowing by Cynthia Cooper and Sherron Watkins, former Vice Presidents at Worldcom and Enron, respectively, and the significant philanthropy displayed by such individuals as Bill Gates

and Warren Buffet. There are also likely to be instances of lower-class individuals exhibiting unethical tendencies, as research on the relationship between concentrations of poverty and violent crime indicates (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). These observations suggest that the association between social class and unethicality is neither categorical nor essential, and point to important boundary conditions to my findings that should be examined in future investigations.

Although the samples in the current investigation were relatively diverse with respect to social class, it will be important for future research to extend my findings to other populations and cultures. For example, studies should be conducted in contexts in which distributions of wealth and poverty are particularly extreme. Such research would provide even more stringent tests of my hypothesis and help determine whether the relationship between social class and unethical behavior persists when economic conditions are especially dire or advantaged. Along these lines, research should examine the association between social class and unethical behavior in other cultures to provide insight into the generalizability of my results and illuminate how levels of inequality within a particular society (e.g., Gini coefficient) help drive these effects. For instance, it would be interesting to explore whether the social class-unethicality link is curtailed in societies that have more egalitarian distributions of wealth (e.g., Sweden).

It will also be important to examine the relationship between social class and other types of unethical behavior not explored in the current investigation. For instance, whereas I focused primarily on unethical acts that, if committed, would enhance individual well-being, other studies should explore tendencies to commit unethical behaviors that do not directly benefit the self. Given that lower-class individuals prioritize social relationships and are more reliant on the strength of their social bonds (e.g., Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Piff et al., 2012), lower-class individuals may prove more willing to commit unethical acts to benefit others. Other-oriented unethical acts, though potentially costly, may signal a person's relational commitment and willingness to assume risks for others' benefit—concerns that may be more salient among lower-class individuals. Moreover, experiments that vary the social identity and class background of the individual who might be impacted by one's own unethical behavior may also reveal interesting class differences in unethical tendencies.

Moving beyond tendencies toward unethical behavior, research should examine whether class differences in unethicality extend to willingness to punish others who are perceived to have transgressed a social or moral boundary. Research on power and moral hypocrisy suggests that high-power individuals are more likely than low-power individuals to condemn others for an unethical act, all the while engaging in more unethical behavior themselves (e.g., Lammers et al., 2010). Similarly, upper-class individuals may prove harsher in their judgments of others' unethicality and endorse stricter punishments. This hypothesis is bolstered by prior work showing that upper-class individuals are more likely to focus on individual characteristics, and less likely to account for environmental factors, in their explanations of others' behavior (Kraus et al., 2009).

On a final note, there is a qualifier to my results that deserves elaboration. My findings could seem to depict greed in a wholly unfavorable light. After all, favorable attitudes toward greed were the single strongest predictor of unethical behavior across my studies, over and above the effect of social class. This empirical evidence parallels historical and contemporary perspectives on greed (Shklar, 1990; Wang & Murnighan, 2011), all of which converge on the notion that greed can motivate individuals to abandon moral principles in the service of material gain. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that greed and the pursuit of self-interest

can be adaptive and functional (Wang & Murnighan, 2011). Indeed, self-interest could account for a range of positive human behaviors and motivations, including caring for one's offspring, helping others, and protecting the environment (Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010; Sober & Wilson, 1998). In light of these considerations, it is important to note that greed and self-interest do not necessarily have pernicious and damaging social repercussions, and it is not necessarily the case that greed prevents good from happening. Rather, as my research and that of others suggests (e.g., Bowles, 2008; Wang & Murnighan, 2011), when the pursuit of self-interest is prioritized above all else—that is, when greed is the single operating principle—ethical standards and moral principles may fall by the wayside and undermine the greater good.

Conclusion

"From the top to the bottom of the ladder, greed is aroused," Durkheim famously wrote (Durkheim, 1951). While greed may indeed be a motivation all people have felt at points in their lives, I argue that greed motives are not equally prevalent across all social strata. As my findings suggest, the pursuit of self-interest is a more fundamental motive among society's elite, and the increased want associated with greater wealth and status can promote wrongdoing. Unethical behavior in the service of self-interest that enhances the individual's wealth and rank in society may be a self-perpetuating dynamic that further exacerbates economic disparities in society (Cagetti & De Nardi, 2008), giving rise to an ever-widening gap between society's haves and have-nots.

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Tables

Table 1.

	Study 1: Cutting at Four-way Intersection			Study 2: Yielding for Pedestrian at Crosswalk		
Vehicle Status	Yielded for Vehicles	Cut Off Vehicles	Cut (%)	Yielded for Pedestrian	Cut Off Pedestrian	Cut (%)
1 (lowest)	24	2	7.7%	5	0	0%
2	31	2	6.1%	20	8	28.6%
3	99	15	13.2%	42	19	31.1%
4	67	7	9.5%	25	20	44.4%
5 (highest)	19	8	29.6%	7	6	46.2%

Table 2.

Variable	Vehicle Status	Cut Off Vehicles
Vehicle Status	___	.12*
Cut Off Vehicles	.12*	___

Table 3.

Variable	Vehicle Status	Cut Off Pedestrian
Vehicle Status	___	.18*
Cut Off Pedestrian	.17*	___

Table 4.

Variable	Social Class	Unethical Decision Making
Social Class	___	.23*
Unethical Decision Making	.20*	___

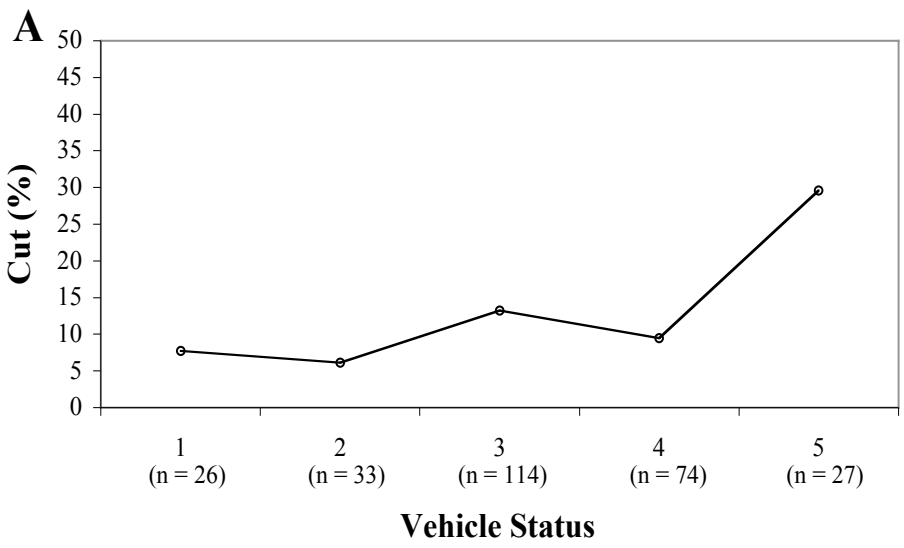
Table 5.

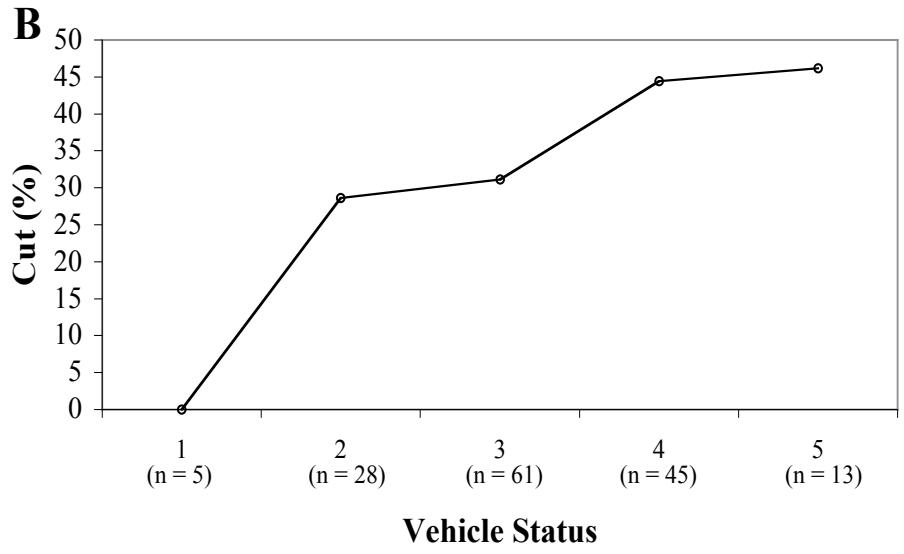
Variable	Social Class	Attitudes Toward Greed	Probability of Telling the Truth
Social Class	___	.36**	-.24*
Attitudes Toward Greed	.36**	___	-.35**
Probability of Telling the Truth	-.25*	-.34**	___

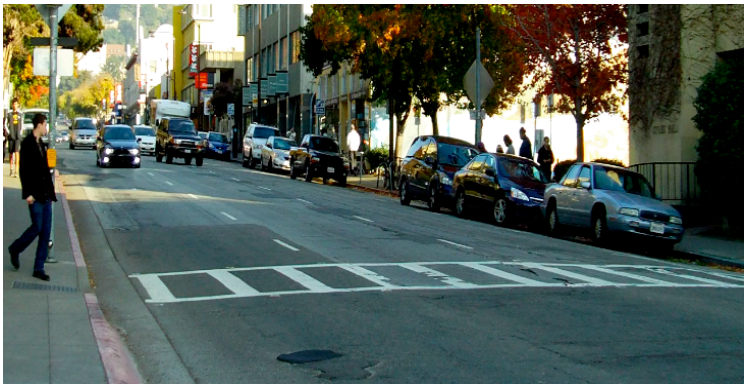
Table 6.

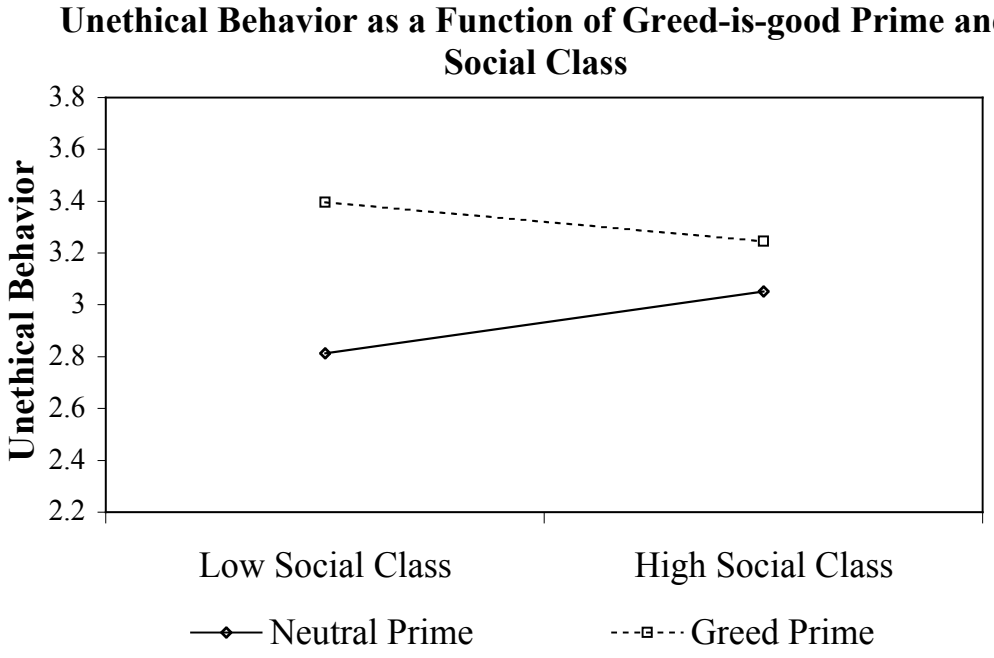
Variable	Social Class	Attitudes Toward Greed	Cheating
Social Class	___	.17*	.14†
Attitudes Toward Greed	.16*	___	.20**
Cheating	.15*	.18*	___

Figures


A
Cut (%)
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
1
(n = 26)
2
(n = 33)
3
(n = 114)
4
(n = 74)
5
(n = 27)
Vehicle Status


B
Cut (%)
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
1
(n = 5)
2
(n = 28)
3
(n = 61)
4
(n = 45)
5
(n = 13)
Vehicle Status




Unethical Behavior as a Function of Greed-is-good Prime and Social Class
Unethical Behavior
3.8
3.6
3.4
3.2
3
2.8
2.6
2.4
2.2
Low Social Class
High Social Class
Neutral Prime
Greed Prime