



WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP
EDGE

An Initiative of the Center for WorkLife Law at
UC Hastings College of the Law

***Leveling the Playing Field
for Class Migrants: Tips for
Individuals and Employers***

Distinguished Professor Joan C. Williams
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University of California, Hastings College of the Law

Practical
Advice

Real-life
Solutions

Social
Science



Outline

1. Why add class?
2. Does class play a role in today's workplace?
3. The class culture gap
4. Tips for organizations
5. Tips for individuals





1. Why add class?





The unspeakable

- “Normative awkwardness”
- But it matters. Ask “class migrants”
 - First generation college students in professional workplaces
 - *93% report their class origin affects their work experience*





Class migrants' unique skills

- CEOs: increased strategic risk-taking
- Army leaders: more effective leaders
- More resourceful, resilient, more socially attuned and responsive





Hidden injuries of class

- Report lower levels of belonging
- Often feel disadvantaged by lack of knowledge of the “rules of the game”
- May be seen as less good a “fit”—even when they are, objectively, highly skilled



Risks for employers

Without addressing the challenges class migrants face, employers:

- Risk not tapping the full talent pool
- Risk backlash from men who feel they aren't privileged, as diversity programs often assume
- Risk not being able to retain diverse talent
 - More likely to be class migrants



2. Does class play a role in today's professional workplace?



“Culture fit”

- Study of investment banks, law firms, management consulting firms
- Culture fit: one of top 3 criteria
 - >1/2 rated as more important than analytical thinking and communication
 - Did not increase with client- or team-facing demands





“Culture fit”

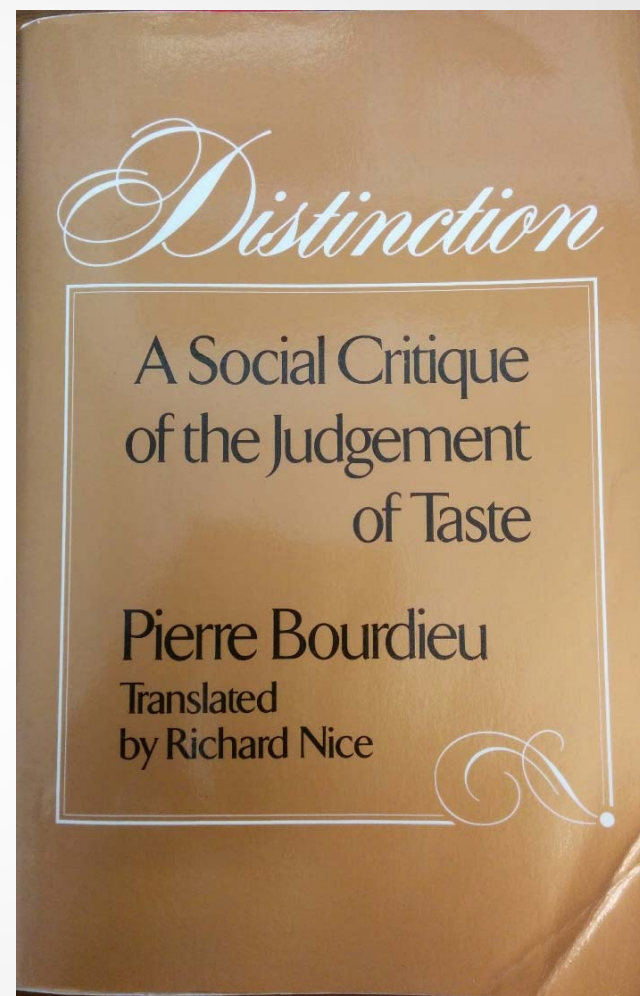
- “I need to be comfortable working everyday with you, then getting stuck in an airport with you, and then going for a beer afterwards.”
 - “Looking-glass merit”
 - Search for a spark
 - “Anyone who plays squash I love.”
 - Extra-curriculars





What are class clues?

- Class is expressed through cultural differences
- What are elite sports?
 - Polo, tennis, windsurfing
- Working class sports?
 - Bowling, basketball, NASCAR





Which fork?

JD Vance of *Hillbilly Elegy*:

- Called from bathroom to find out which fork to use.
- “interviews were about passing a social test—a test of belonging, of holding your own in a corporate boardroom, of making connections with potential future clients.”





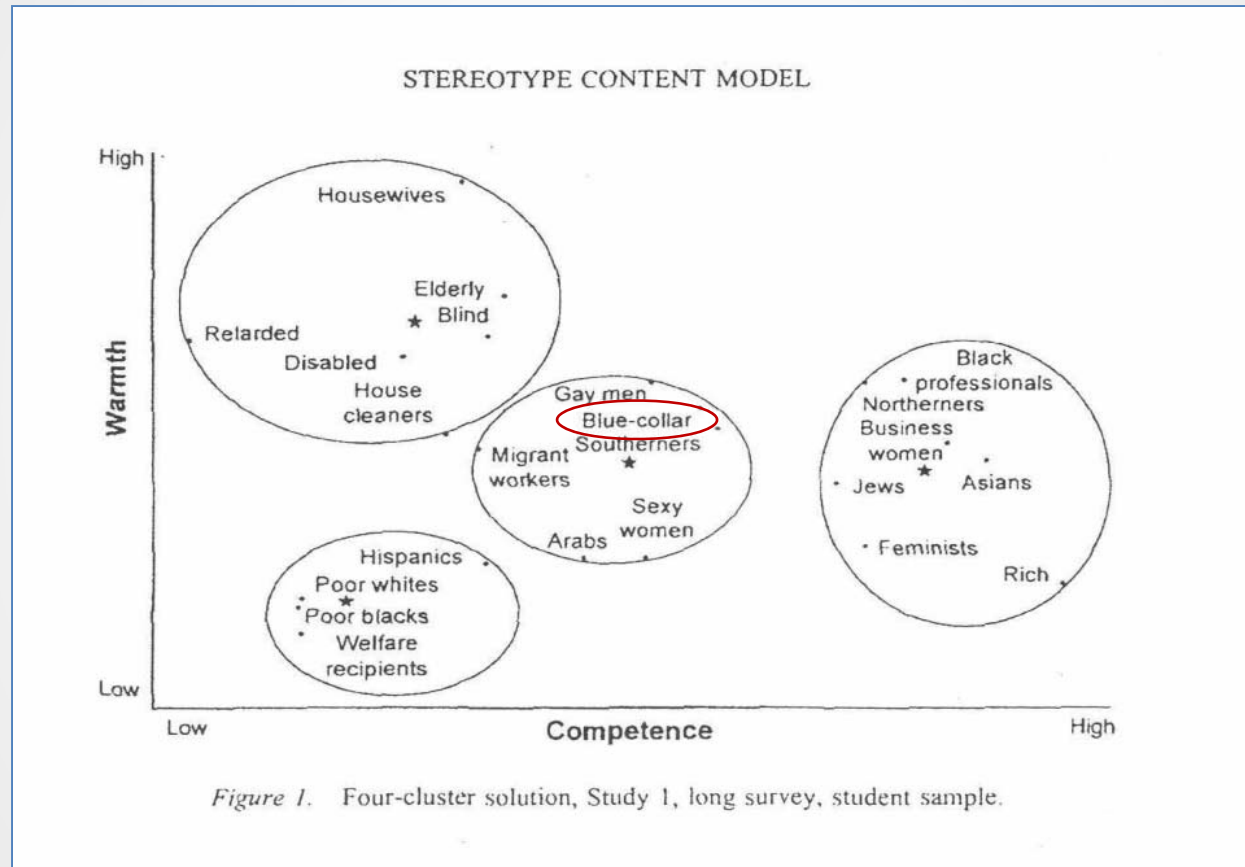
“Covering”

- He was “covering”
 - Mainstream your appearance, behavior and attitudes
 - Avoid behaviors stereotypical of your group
 - Avoid standing up for your group
 - Avoid associating with other members of group
- Taxing, effortful, isolating





Class and competence



Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002

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Class and competence

- 300 fictitious CVs sent to 147 top law firms
 - All: top 1% of class, impressive work and academic achievements, 2nd tier schools
 - Subtle cues about class origins
 - Pick-up soccer, country music, mentor for first-generation students
 - Sailing, polo, classical music, mentor for first-year students





Class and competence

- 16% of men with elite cues got callbacks
- ...only 1% of class-migrant men
 - Non-elite women disadvantaged, too (6%)
 - Higher-class man seen as more competent and a better fit (16%)
 - Elite women seen as a good fit but uncommitted (4%)



3. The class culture gap





Class culture gap

- Elite families differ from non-elites:
 - Networks
 - Attitudes towards work
 - Attitudes towards family life
 - Self-promotion



Elite social networks

- 50-75% of professionals get jobs through the “strength of weak ties:” acquaintances
- Need to know how to interact with strangers
- Establish relationships with people potentially helpful to their career





Elite social networks

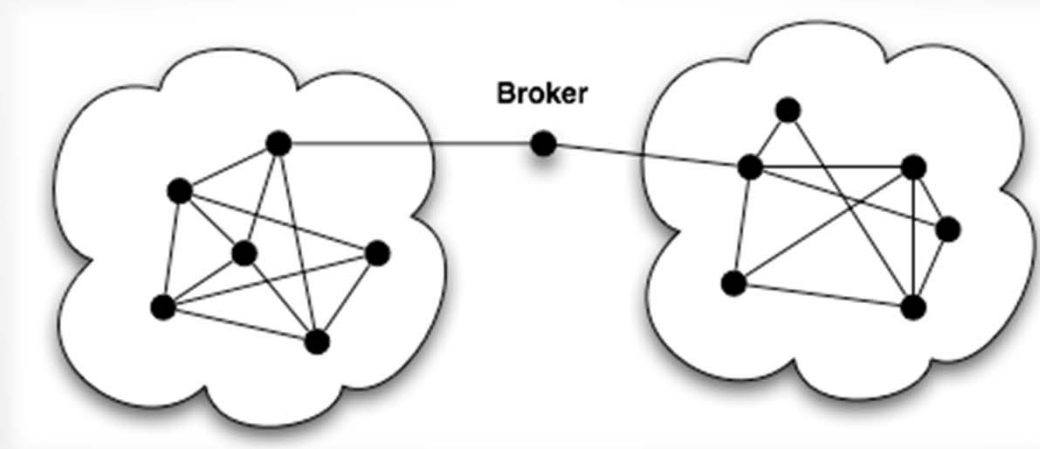
“Entrepreneurial networks:”

- Broad networks
- Shallow ties
- Network brokers gain power by linking communities for mutual business advantage



Network broker

Someone who connects two otherwise unconnected networks





Non-elite social networks

“Clique networks:”

- Small networks where everyone knows everyone else
 - So no brokerage opportunities
- Ties are deep, and multi-faceted





Elite family and social life

- Family ties with adult children chiefly emotional
 - Often quite attenuated
 - National job markets mean adult children often live far from parents and people they grew up with
- Social ties forged as adults often mix personal and business, e.g. golf
- Tact and irony highly valued



Non-elite family and social life

- Family plays a larger role in social life of both children and adults
 - No national job networks; people typically stay close to where they grew up
- Social life often revolves around a small set of family and old friends
- Honesty, straight talk, respect highly valued





Elite attitudes towards work

Elite men “attach great importance to success-related traits such as ambition and a strong work ethic....These traits are doubly sacred...as signals of both moral and socioeconomic purity.”





Class acts

“Working rich” display their extreme schedules:”

➤ “I am slammed”

➤ Time divide





Work devotion schema

High-level professionals are expected “to demonstrate commitment by making work the **central focus** of their lives...unencumbered by family responsibilities.”





Work and identity

- “Complete euphoria”
- “Being totally consumed”
- “Holidays are a nuisance because you have to stop working....I missed my favorite uncle’s funeral.”





Non-elite attitudes

- “Family comes first”
- You work to support your family, not as the undisputed center of your identity
- Can be hard to explain to your family why, e.g. you have to work through holidays when you are expected to be home





Childrearing in the elite

- “Concerted cultivation”
- Teams and lessons teach skills necessary for professional jobs
 - Competition
 - Ability to interact with strangers
 - How to build broad and shallow networks



Childrearing in the elite

- Performance pressure
- Displaying your accomplishments
- Verbal play
- Standing up for oneself
- Self-reflection/self-revelation
- *Central logic: Individualism*

Douvan, 1956; Stephens, Fryberg & Marcus, 2012

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Non-elite children

- Less experience interacting with people outside close circle of family and old friends
- More unstructured play
- Often less performance pressure
- “Admitting to ability or intelligence was a great sin and indicated that you were ‘stuck on yourself.’”
- *Central logic: Interdependence*





Childrearing is learning to labor

Prepares you for adult roles:

- Nonelite
 - Respect for authority, adherence to rules, and self-discipline: suitable for order takers
- Elite
 - Independence, the ability to “take initiative” and “think for yourself”—while at the same time not “crossing the line:” suitable for order givers



The role of talk

- “In my family, a conversation about one’s work typically consumed only six words. (“How was your day?” “Oh, fine.”) Speaking otherwise, in detail or with enthusiasm, was to risk display of the dreaded swelled head.”
- “Talking with some stranger about my feelings made me want to vomit.”

Lebsack, 2004; Vance, 2016





3. Tips for organizations



Hiring only from elite schools

- Studies show:
 - <10% of college students in the middle three quintiles of family income go to very selective schools, < 3% to elites or Ivys
 - Almost half of Harvard students from families in the top 4% of family income

NY Times, The Upshot, Jan. 18, 2017; Rivera, 2015.

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Hiring only from elite schools

- A child of professionals is 3x more likely to be admitted to a selective private institution than a working class white with similar qualifications.
- Family expectations are one of the many reasons non-elite kids stay close to home.

Pruitt, 2015, citing Espenshade & Radford, 2009.

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Hiring only from elite schools

- For years, Google only hired from top universities.
- Then it found that many of the best people didn't go to the best schools.
- Other studies found that new hires from elite schools were more likely to want to leave their jobs soon after starting.

Bock, 2015; Dinovitzer & Garth, 2007; Owens & Rivera, 2012

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Hiring only from elite schools

At Google:

- “We now prefer to take a bright, hardworking student who graduated at the top of her class at a state school over an average or even above-average Ivy League grad.”
- Looks for: resilience, ability to overcome hardship.





Culture fit

- Define it!
- How Google defines “Googleness:”
 - Enjoying fun
 - “A certain dose of intellectual humility”—ability to admit when you’re wrong
 - Comfort with ambiguity
 - Taken some courageous or interesting paths



Non-elite candidates' strengths

Big Law former hiring partner:

- “They are willing to put in the hours required with less complaining, they remain at the firm longer and they are far less ‘entitled.’... And they often bring a more common sense approach to client service and problem solving.”





Class clues

- Public high school
- Community college
- Public university – particularly lower ranked university
- Hometown
- “What is the largest personal or professional obstacle you have had to overcome?”





Class clues

- Considerable work experience
- Types of jobs before/during/after education (favoring anything that involves significant client service and/or manual labor)
- Clubs (4H, scouts, ROTC, church youth group)
- International travel (lack thereof)





Teamwork

- Class migrants tend to be better at teamwork than do people from upper-middle or upper class backgrounds
- Interdependence v. individualism
- Much professional work requires teamwork
- “Entitled” millennials reflect concerted cultivation in elite families





“Friends of friends”

- Again: single strongest determinant of social networks is similarity
- If you want to reproduce the demography of your existing organization, hiring friends of friends is a good way to do so
- Not if you want to tap the full talent pool





Make rules transparent

- If self-promotion is important, make that explicit
- Hand out our worksheet on how to write an effective self-evaluation
www.biasinterrupters.org
- Tell people: here's when it's appropriate to ask for a promotion, raise





WLE webinars can help



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Ten Steps Towards Successful Self-Promotion for Women and Diverse Professionals

Distinguished Professor Joan C. Williams
Director, Center for WorkLife Law

Practical Advice

Real-life Situations

Social Science

“The Science of Connecting: Building Value in Networks to Achieve your Professional Goals.”

“Ten Steps Towards Successful Self-Promotion for Women and Diverse Professionals.”



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*The Science of Connecting:
Building Value in Networks To
Achieve Your Professional Goals*

Distinguished Professor Joan C. Williams
Director, Center for WorkLife Law
University of California, Hastings College of the Law

Practical Advice

Real-life Solutions

Social Science

Available to members at
womensleadershipedge.org > Knowledge Center





4. Tips for class migrants





“Limbo”

- “That’s the education talking.”
- “I feel like I have changed sides in some very important game.”
- Disapproval of “people who forget where they come from.”

Sumer in Dews & Law, 1995; Lamont, 2000; LaPaglia in Dews & Law, 1995

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Tips: mixed signals

- 70% felt disconnect
- 20% felt “family achievement guilt”
- Don’t take it personally
 - » It’s about them, not you.
- Make it clear that you don’t see just one metric of success

Dittman & Stephens, 2017; Williams, 2017; Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015.

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Tips: code switching

- “Covering” may feel inauthentic, disloyal
- Remember, most people are covering something
- May help to think of it as code switching
 - “I sell toilets”





Tips: make your own blend

- Each side of the class culture gap has its own upside
- For me:
 - Sincerity and directness
 - Family comes first
 - Perspective on work devotion
 - Perspective on performance pressure





Tips: social networks

- Class migrants sometimes feel professionals' mixture of business and personal motives is inauthentic
- You need to find a way to make a connection that feels authentic for you
 - Only try to make friends with people you actually like!



Tips: social networks

- If they are your friend, why shouldn't they want to help you?
- Reciprocity
 - Mutual exchange of favors
 - Taps norm of interdependence





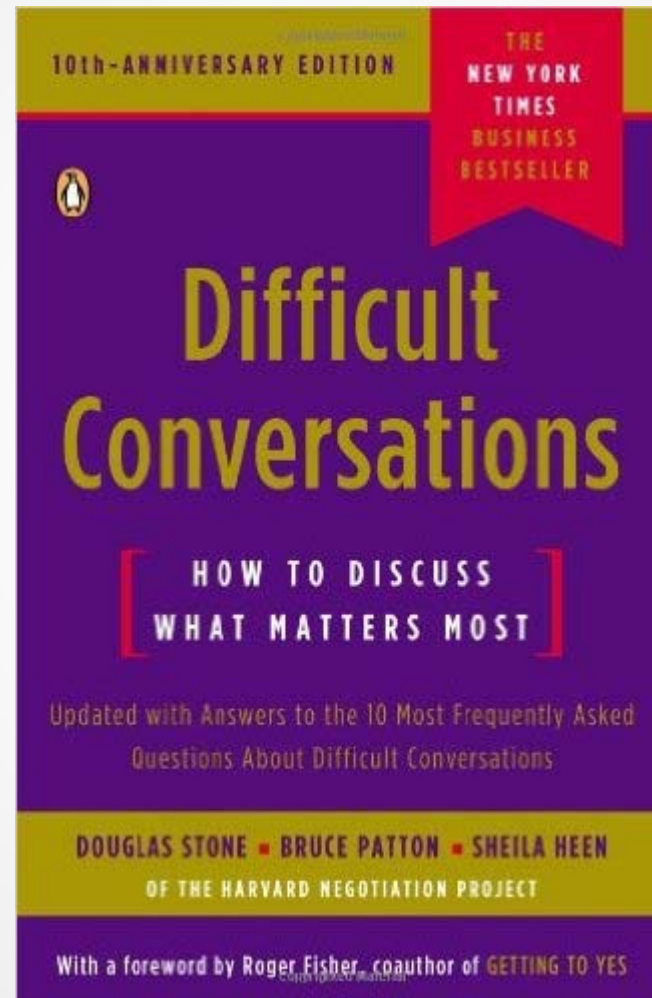
Tips: self-promotion

- “Boasting and self-promotion and credit hogging are wrong and unseemly.”
- Form a posse
- Praise your team
- Good advice for women, of all classes!
- Asian-Americans and the modesty mandate
- Listen to the WLE webinar on self-promotion

Lubrano, 2004; Williams & Dempsey, 2014



Tips: talk





WHITE WORKING CLASS



*Overcoming
Class Cluelessness
in America*

JOAN C. WILLIAMS

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