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Social Class, Power, and Selfishness: When and Why Upper and Lower Class Individuals Behave Unethically

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Are the rich more unethical than the poor? To answer this question, the current research introduces a key conceptual distinction between selfish and unethical behavior. Based on this distinction, the current article offers 2 novel findings that illuminate the relationship between social class and unethical behavior. First, the effects of social class on unethical behavior are not invariant; rather, the effects of social class are moderated by whether unethical behavior benefits the self or others. Replicating past work, social class positively predicted unethical behavior; however, this relationship was only observed when that behavior was self-beneficial. When unethical behavior was performed to benefit others, social class *negatively* predicted unethical behavior; lower class individuals were more likely than upper class individuals to engage in unethical behavior. Overall, social class predicts people's tendency to behave selfishly, rather than predicting unethical behavior per se. Second, individuals' sense of power drove the effects of social class on unethical behavior. Evidence for this relationship was provided in three forms. First, income, but not education level, predicted unethical behavior. Second, feelings of power mediated the effect of social class on unethical behavior, but feelings of status did not. Third, two distinct manipulations of power produced the same moderation by self-versus-other beneficiary as was found with social class. The current theoretical framework and data both synthesize and help to explain a range of findings in the social class and power literatures.

Keywords: unethical behavior, self- vs. other-beneficial, agency, communion, power

Supplemental materials: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000008.supp>

Are the rich more unethical than the poor? Anecdotal evidence suggests that upper class individuals seem prone to engage in unethical behavior. For instance, presidential candidate John Edwards cheated on his wife. The CEO of Hewlett Packard, Mark Hurd, falsified his expense reports. And billionaire Leona Helmsley, who was found guilty of tax evasion, famously declared, "We don't pay taxes. Only the little people pay taxes."

Consistent with these examples, recent empirical research reports a positive relationship between social class and unethical behavior (Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). Across seven experiments, Piff and colleagues found that upper class individuals were more likely to engage in lying and cheating than their lower class counterparts. These findings imply a robust positive relationship between social class and unethical behavior that support the anecdotes of Edwards, Hurd, and Helmsley.

In contrast to the conclusion that the rich are unilaterally predisposed to behave more unethically than the poor, consider the seminal scenario from Kohlberg (1963) that literally became the foundation of moral psychology. In this famous case, the wife of a man named Heinz was near death and desperately needed a drug costing \$2,000, but Heinz could not afford it. As described in Kohlberg, "Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife" (Kohlberg, 1963, p. 19). Heinz's lack of resources led him to act unethically, but he did so to help another person. Or, consider this bank robbery: Mark Smith, aged 59, walked into a bank in Watsonville, California, and declared that he had a bomb in his backpack and demanded \$2,000. It turns out that Mark reported robbing the bank not to help himself but to help pay his friend's rent (Squires, 2010).

These examples invite the possibility that individuals in lower social class might sometimes be more prone to engage in unethical behavior, and are consistent with findings that low-social-class individuals do engage in unethical behavior (e.g., Blau & Blau, 1982; Daly, Wilson, & Vasdev, 2001). In both cases, people of lower social class acted unethically. However, both robbers stole not to help themselves but to help another person.

The current research addresses these inconsistencies in anecdotes and past findings by providing a new perspective on the relationship between social class and unethical behavior. We propose that social class does not inevitably increase people's pro-

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pensity to behave unethically. Rather, we posit the relationship between social class and unethical behavior can hinge on whether the unethical act benefits the self or others.

Our main prediction stems from a key conceptual distinction between unethical behavior and selfish behavior. We propose that those high in social class are psychologically disposed to behave more selfishly but not unethically *per se*. Furthermore, we propose selfishness among those higher in social class increases their propensity to behave unethically to benefit the self, but this does not lead them to commit unethical acts that benefit others. In contrast, we propose that those lower in social class are psychologically predisposed to behave more unethically than upper class individuals when unethical behavior is performed *to help* another person. Indeed, Edwards, Hurd, and Helmsley engaged in unethical behavior that solely benefited themselves, whereas Heinz and Mark Smith engaged in unethical behavior that was, at least in part, in the service of helping another person.

Our hypotheses are grounded in recent conceptual and empirical work on the psychology of power demonstrating that having power increases the focus on, and value of, the self, but lacking power increases the focus on, and value of, others (Rucker, Dubois, & Galinsky, 2011; Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012; see also Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Lee & Tiedens, 2001; Overbeck, 2010; Williams, 2014). We first introduce the concept of unethical behavior and conceptually distinguish it from selfish behavior. Next, we review work on social class, unethical behavior, and power to formulate new predictions as to the relationship between social class and unethical behavior.

Distinguishing Unethicality From Selfishness

Unethical behavior has long been at the center of philosophy (e.g., Hobbes, 1651/1968), psychology (e.g., Kohlberg, 1963), and management (e.g., Zey-Ferrell, Weaver & Ferrell, 1979). In social psychology, unethical behavior typically refers to any action that is “illegal or morally unacceptable to the large community” (Jones, 1991, p. 367) or general dishonesty (Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008), including cheating and lying (Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998; Gino & Bazerman, 2009; Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). Because unethical behavior depends on social norms, what people view as moral or not is malleable (e.g., Ayal & Gino, 2011; Monin & Jordan, 2009).

Research on unethical behavior has largely emphasized situations in which individuals perform unethical actions to benefit themselves. To the best of our knowledge, empirical research has left unexamined situations in which people perform unethical actions to benefit others. One reason for this asymmetry might be that self-interest and unethical behavior often co-occur, especially in organizational settings in which self-interest is linked to maximizing one’s profits (Grant, 2007; Wolfe, 1988). However, this focus leaves unexplored situations where people engage in unethical behavior to benefit others. In doing so, research has confounded two distinct constructs: selfishness and unethical behavior.

Despite their co-occurrence, selfishness and unethical behavior are conceptually distinct. We define selfishness as a heightened concern with one’s own personal profit or pleasure, a definition compatible with common vernacular (Merriam-Webster Inc., 2009). In contrast, as previously noted, unethical behavior refers to

any action “illegal or morally unacceptable to the large community” (Jones, 1991).

These definitions make clear that unethical behavior is conceptually orthogonal to selfishness. A selfish act can be normatively appropriate or acceptable (e.g., not helping others study for a test to retain one’s advantage), or violate legal or moral laws (e.g., cheating on a test). Similarly, an unethical act can be selfish (e.g., lying to benefit oneself) or unselfish (e.g., lying to take blame and keep a friend out of trouble). Yet, many of the dominant paradigms used in the literature confound unethical behavior with the opportunity to benefit the self in the form of financial rewards (e.g., a monetary reward for a task; Gino, Ayal, & Ariely, 2009), personal convenience (e.g., cutting off pedestrians while driving; Piff et al., 2012), or another self-relevant reward (e.g., cheating to get a better test score; Mazar et al., 2008). However, situations in which unethical behavior benefits others have been overlooked.

Having conceptually distinguished the constructs of selfishness and unethical behavior, we next explore current findings and theorizing on the link between unethical behavior and social class.

Social Class and Unethical Behavior

Social class—people’s relative standing in society based on wealth and/or education—is a central construct in social science (Weber, Gerth, & Wright, 1958) and economics (Schumpeter, 1951), with interest spread across disciplines from psychology (Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012) to epidemiology (Marmot, 2004). Relative to their higher class counterparts, lower class individuals have fewer economic resources (Drenea, 2000; Oakes & Rossi, 2003); fewer educational opportunities (Snibbe & Markus, 2005); more limited access to social institutions such as elite schools, universities, and social clubs (Oakes & Rossi, 2003); and occupy a subordinate rank in society (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). Lower class individuals often face greater stress in their close relationships (Gallo, Bogart, Vranceanu, & Matthews, 2005) and violence at home (Staggs, Long, Mason, Krishnan, & Riger, 2007).

Recent empirical work has found that higher class individuals have a greater tendency to behave unethically than lower class individuals (Piff et al., 2012). In one experiment, participants completed the MacArthur social class scale, a measure of people’s self-reported class rank, and then read a series of scenarios and indicated the extent to which they would engage in an unethical behavior (Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008). For example, in one scenario participants were asked to imagine working at a fast-food restaurant in which employees were not allowed to eat food without paying for it. Participants read that they came to work straight after school and were hungry, and they were asked to indicate whether they would eat something without paying for it (Detert et al., 2008). Results revealed that social class positively predicted participants’ likelihood of engaging in such behavior. In another experiment, Piff and colleagues (2012) had participants play a game of chance in which they could win a cash prize depending on the sum of five die rolls, presumably random, but which, in reality, always fell short of the required sum. The tendency to report a total exceeding the critical sum served as a direct behavioral measure of cheating. Higher class individuals engaged in greater unethical behavior, and Piff et al. found this was mediated by more favorable attitudes toward greed. These

findings imply a positive relationship between social class and unethical behavior.

The role of greed that Piff et al. (2012) highlighted captures the idea that social class is positively related to selfishness. However, as highlighted in the introduction of this paper, the classic case of Heinz suggests that a lack of resources can lead people to act unethically. We also noted that Heinz stole in the service of assisting someone else.

One possible resolution to the contradictory findings regarding the relationship between social class and unethical behavior may be the nature of the beneficiary of the unethical action: self or other. As we delineate next, we propose that lower class individuals may exhibit a greater concern for others that can increase unethical behavior when lying or cheating will benefit those individuals.

Social Class as a Source of Power and Status

To better understand the dynamic relationship between social class and unethical behavior, we build a theoretical bridge between the literature on social class and the literature on power. Piff et al. (2012) define social class as “an individual’s rank vis-à-vis others in society in terms of wealth, occupational prestige, and education” and characterize upper class individuals as having “abundant resources and elevated societal rank” (p. 4086). This definition contains two primary bases of hierarchical rank: power and status. Power is defined as asymmetric control over resources in social relationships; status is defined as respect and admiration in the eyes of others (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Thus, it is unclear which of these variables—control over resources or elevated status—is the primary psychological driver of the effects of social class.

Social class and power are conceptually and empirically distinct. For instance, a person might be of a higher class but have little power (e.g., the Queen of England has no political power), or be of a modest socioeconomic background but have a lot of power (e.g., a factory worker who is president of the workers’ union). Yet, we propose that higher social class, by having greater resources in the form of greater income (Kraus et al., 2012), might increase people’s psychological feelings of powerfulness. Put simply, we predict that, all else equal, upper social class individuals will feel more powerful than lower social class individuals. Although social class has been measured using both income and education levels (Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012a), to the extent that differences in unethical behavior are ultimately driven by underlying differences in power, which is control over resources (Galinsky, Rucker, & Magee, 2015; Magee & Galinsky, 2008), we propose that income will predict unethical behavior more strongly than will education.

Consistent with the theoretical link between social class and power, numerous studies have found that social class and power produce similar effects. At the hormonal level, high power and upper social class trigger similar neuroendocrine changes (Carney, Cuddy, & Yap, 2010; Carney et al., 2014; Marmot, 2004; Sapolsky, 1998, 2001). States of low, relative to high, power have also been associated with greater spending on others (Rucker et al., 2011), similar to the effect of social class (Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010). More central to our investigation, as with social class, a link exists between power and unethical behavior. Participants in a state of high power, like members of the

upper class, were more likely to lie about a dice roll (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010; Experiment 1). In addition, having, as opposed to lacking, power has been associated with lying (Boles, Croson, & Murnighan, 2000), and with lying more easily (Carney et al., 2014). In fact, even situational and environmental factors associated with high power (e.g., taking an expansive pose; Huang Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Guillory, 2011) can increase people’s propensity to engage in unethical behavior (Yap, Wazlawek, Lucas, Cuddy, & Carney, 2013).

An Agentic-Communal Model of Power

Recent advances in the power literature suggest the possibility that power might affect people’s propensities to engage in self-beneficial versus other-beneficial unethical behavior. Rucker et al. (2012) theorized that a number of the effects of power can be understood by a general tendency for high power to foster an agentic orientation, and for low power to foster a communal orientation (Bakan, 1966). Here, agency refers to the existence of the individual as an agent, and manifests itself in self-assertion and direction toward one’s own goals. In contrast, communion focuses on other people and manifests itself in a reluctance to act without consideration of others. Put differently, whereas power gives the powerful the freedom to pursue their own interests with fewer constraints (i.e., greater agency), the powerless are dependent on others and often require communion to achieve their goals (see also Chen et al., 2001; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Lee & Tiedens, 2001; Overbeck, 2010; Williams, 2014).

Lending support to the link between high power and agency, high-power individuals typically exhibit greater agency (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Jiang, Zhan, & Rucker, 2014; Williams, 2014). And just as agency makes people focus on their own goals (Abele, Cuddy, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008), so does power (Guinote, 2007; Whitson et al., 2013). In contrast, those without power are fundamentally dependent on others (Emerson, 1962). That is, the powerless *de facto* rely on others to obtain resources they need to survive and prosper. In turn, this state of dependency naturally induces powerless individuals to direct their attention and effort toward those who are in their social proximity and might constitute an alternative resource for them. As such, powerlessness fosters cognitive and behavioral tendencies that are consistent with a more communal focus. For instance, powerlessness is associated with greater attention to others and perspective-taking (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008), compassion and the ability to recognize the emotions of others (van Kleef, et al., 2008), and the propensity to dedicate resources to others (Rucker et al., 2011)—three key markers of a communal orientation (Bakan, 1966). For example, Rucker et al. (2011) found that low power increased a sense of dependence on, and generosity toward, others above baseline levels. Overall, evidence suggests that a state of high power can foster agency, whereas low power can prompt communion.

An Integrative Perspective: Both Upper and Lower Social Class Individuals Behave Unethically

Integrating the ideas that (a) the resources associated with higher social class are a source of power, and (b) higher power shifts the focus toward agency over communion, we put forth the following predictions relating social class to unethical behavior.

First, we predict that individuals higher in social class will engage in more selfish behavior. As a consequence, consistent with prior research, upper class individuals will engage in unethical behavior that directly benefits the self. Second, individuals of lower social class will engage in more communal behavior that takes into account the needs and concerns of others. As a result, we predict that *both* upper and lower class individuals will engage in unethical behavior, and we further propose that the key determinant will be the beneficiary of this unethical behavior. Third, we predict that differences in unethical behavior for the self and for others will be driven by one's sense of power.

Six experiments systematically test our hypotheses: Experiments 1 and 2 demonstrate that social class positively predicts self-beneficial cheating behavior but negatively predicts other-beneficial cheating behavior. Experiment 2 compares distinct components of social class and, consistent with our proposed bridge between social class and power, finds that income is a better predictor of unethical behavior than education. Experiment 3 shows that the effects of social class on unethical behavior are mediated by differences in power but not by status. Experiments 4, 5, and 6 provide convergent evidence and unpack the causal chain by manipulating social class and investigating its effects on people's sense of power (Experiment 4), and manipulating power and observing its effects on unethical behavior (Experiments 5 and 6). Thus, we use two distinct approaches for testing the role of power in unethical behavior: the measurement of mediation approach (Experiment 3) and the experimental-causal-chain approach (Experiments 4, 5, and 6;

Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). These experiments provide systematic support for our perspective and demonstrate that the effects of social class on unethical behavior are (a) moderated by whether the behavior is self- versus other-beneficial, and (b) driven by power.

Importantly, we consistently replicate the findings that have documented a positive effect of social class and power on unethical behavior (e.g., Lammers et al., 2010; Piff et al., 2012; Yap et al., 2013). We do, however, aim to inform these prior findings by testing whether the opposite relationship between social class and unethical behavior holds when the primary beneficiary of an unethical act is another person.

Across all experiments, we report all conditions and any data exclusions. For each experiment, sample sizes were based on subject availability as well as unrelated research projects run in conjunction with these experiments. No additional data were added after data analyses began. In some experiments, we collected additional measures after the key hypothesis-related measures for exploratory purposes. A list of these measures is available from the authors upon request.

Across experiments, for analyses the self-beneficial condition was coded as 1, and the other-beneficial condition was coded as 0, unless otherwise specified. In Experiments 1, 2, and 3 we mean-centered the social class measure and standardized all variables prior to conducting regressions, except when conducting the spotlight analyses (see Table 1 for summary statistics for all the variables collected in each experiment).

Table 1
Sample Statistics for Variables in Experiments 1–6

Experiment	Variable	Mean	SD	SEM	Min	Max
1	Social class	4.49	1.89	.15	1	9
	Age	37.79	14.25	1.16	19	67
	Sex	.42	.49	.04	0	1
2	DV (lying behavior)	.21	.41	.033	0	1
	Income (1 to 8 scale)	4.11	1.89	.21	1	8
	Education (1 to 4 scale)	2.54	1.03	.11	1	4
	Age	33.68	12.33	1.37	19	66
	Sex	.38	.49	.05	0	1
3	DV (likelihood to engage in unethical behavior)	4.06	1.34	.15	1.13	7
	Social class	4.70	1.92	.17	1	9
	Age	33.16	11.14	.99	18	67
	Sex	.45	.50	.04	0	1
	Power	4.22	1.15	.10	1.75	7
	Status	4.17	1.31	.11	1	7
4	DV (likelihood to engage in unethical behavior)	4.09	1.08	.09	1.38	7
	Age	21.15	2.82	.23	18	34
	Sex	.55	.50	.04	0	1
5	DV: Sense of power	3.65	1.77	.44	1	7
	Age	20.56	1.16	.10	18	23
	Sex	.51	.50	.04	0	1
	DV (Likelihood to lie)	3.87	1.57	.14	1.33	8
	Manipulation check power	4.35	1.79	.16	1	9
6	Manipulation check mood	3.68	1.16	.10	1	7
	Age	20.51	1.17	.10	18	24
	Sex	.43	.49	.04	0	1
	DV (lying behavior)	.47	.50	.04	0	1
	Manipulation check power	4.40	1.81	.16	1	8

Note. SD = standard deviation; SEM = standard error of the mean; Min = minimum; Max = maximum; DV = dependent variable. Sex coded as 0 = female, 1 = male.

Experiment 1: Social Class and Cheating Behavior on Behalf of the Self or Others

Experiment 1 tested our hypothesis that higher social class leads to increased unethical behavior when that behavior benefits the self, whereas lower social class leads to increased unethical behavior when that behavior benefits others. In this experiment, we examined unethical behavior in the form of cheating.

Method

One hundred fifty-one participants (87 female; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.79$, $SD = 14.25$) were assigned to one of two conditions (lie beneficiary: self vs. other) in which they played a (virtual) game of chance. Participants were inhabitants of a large metropolitan area in Europe and were individually approached by an experimenter to participate in a short survey. Upon agreeing to participate, participants were directed toward a closed booth equipped with a computer and directions to start the task.

Unethical behavior measure. We adapted the material from Piff et al. (2012; Study 6), with one key modification: participants' behavior would either benefit themselves (as in Piff et al., 2012) or another person (new condition). Participants "rolled" a die consecutively 5 times by clicking on a "roll" button. After each roll, the screen displayed one side of a six-sided die. Participants were told that to be entered in a lottery for a \$50 gift card, the total had to add up to at least 14. Importantly, participants completed the task alone and were told that because the experimenter had no way of ascertaining their individual rolls, they were responsible for tracking the number of points obtained and reporting the total for the five rolls at the end of the game. As the die roll was programmed to add up to 12 (Piff et al., 2012), any reports of 14 or higher reflected cheating.

Self-other beneficial manipulation. In the self-beneficial condition, the potential lottery gains would go to participants directly. In the other-beneficial condition, the gains would go to a person of the participant's choice. Participants in the other-beneficial condition were explicitly instructed to indicate the name and e-mail address of the person they would like to receive the product if they won the lottery (Rucker et al., 2011).

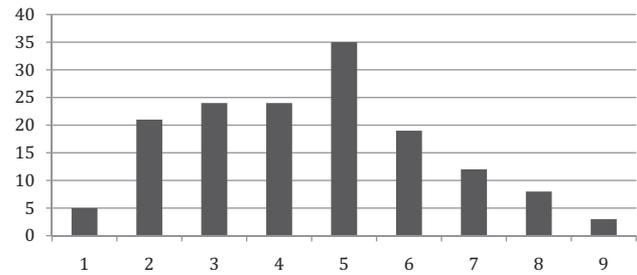
Social class measures. After reporting their score, participants completed a measure of social class (Adler et al., 2000). Specifically, they were presented with a 10-step ladder, were told the ladder represented where people stand in society, and were asked where they would place themselves on this ladder (see Figure 1 for distribution of responses to the scale).

Demographic information. Finally, participants reported their age and gender.

Results and Discussion

Unethical behavior. A logistic regression predicting cheating behavior from social class and recipient revealed no main effects of social class or recipient ($p > .92$). However, a significant Social Class \times Recipient interaction emerged, $B = 1.58$, $SE = 0.32$, Wald's $\chi^2(1) = 24.27$, $p < .001$. In the self-beneficial condition, social class positively predicted cheating behavior, $B = 1.55$, $SE = 0.44$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 4.74$,¹ Wald's $\chi^2(1) = 12.53$, $p < .001$, such that higher social class led to more cheating. In contrast, in the other-

Distribution of social class scores, Experiment 1



Distribution of social class scores, Experiment 3

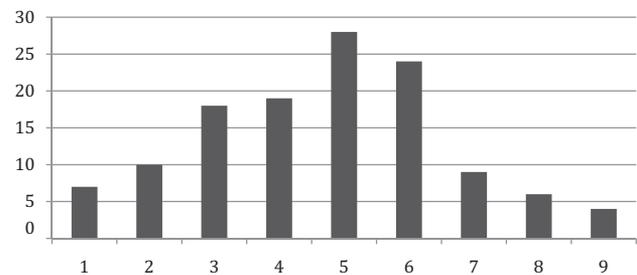


Figure 1. Histograms reflecting the distribution of social class measures collected in Experiments 1 (top) and 3 (bottom). The x axis represents people's standing on the ladder representing social hierarchy, with greater number indicating higher position on the ladder.

beneficial condition, social class negatively predicted cheating behavior, $B = -1.60$, $SE = 0.46$, $\text{Exp}(B) = .202$, Wald's $\chi^2(1) = 11.78$, $p = .001$. The interaction remained significant when controlling for age and participant sex, $B = 1.63$, $SE = 0.33$, Wald's $\chi^2(1) = 24.53$, $p < .001$.

Spotlight analyses. We used spotlight analyses (Fitzsimons, 2008; Irwin & McClelland, 2001) to observe the effects of our lie beneficiary manipulation within low-social-class (one standard deviation below the average social class, $M = 2.60$ on the 1 to 10 social class scale) and high-social-class (one standard deviation above the mean, $M = 6.38$) participants. Among high-social-class individuals ($+1 SD$), participants were significantly more likely to cheat for themselves than for others, $B = 3.52$, $SE = 0.92$, $\text{Exp}(B) = 33.96$, Wald's $\chi^2(1) = 14.64$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 2). Among low-social-class individuals ($-1 SD$), participants were significantly more likely to cheat for others than for themselves, $B = -2.77$, $SE = 0.79$, $\text{Exp}(B) = .062$, Wald's $\chi^2(1) = 12.25$, $p < .001$. Overall, social class positively predicted self-beneficial cheating but negatively predicted other-beneficial cheating.

¹ We included $\text{Exp}(B)$ when presenting main effects of logistic regression analyses (Experiments 1 and 2) to give an idea of the effect size. $\text{Exp}(B)$ represents the exponentiation of the B coefficient and should be interpreted as an odds ratio. Because of the nonlinearity of the exponential function, the size of $\text{Exp}(B)$ greatly varies as a function of both the size and sign of B.

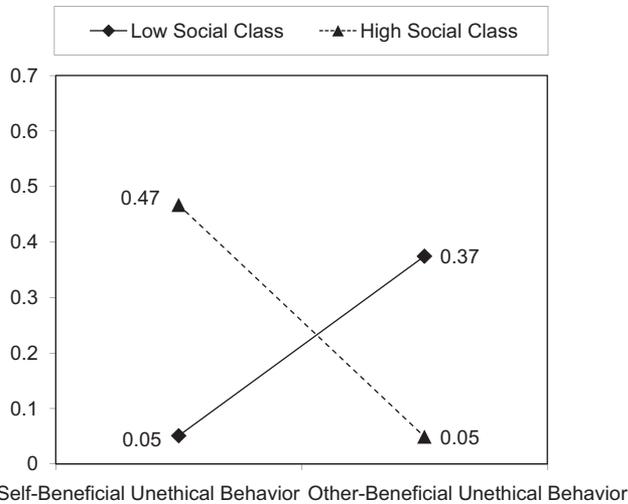


Figure 2. Experiment 1: Probability of engaging in self-beneficial versus other-beneficial unethical behavior as a function of social class at $\pm 1SD$.

Experiment 2: Income Predicts Cheating Behavior on Behalf of the Self or Others

Experiment 2 measured specific antecedents of social class in the form of participants' self-reported income as well as their education. Although income and education are both facets of social class (Piff et al., 2012), they reflect distinct bases of hierarchical differentiation (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Income, like power, is related to control over valued resources and, as such, more likely to be intrinsically linked to power (e.g., Furnham & Argyle, 1998). Supporting evidence that money and power, while conceptually distinct, can share a close relationship comes from research by Vohs, Mead, and Goode (2006), who found that exposure to money can lead to similar consequences as power, such as an increase in self-focus. In addition, a lack of power increases people's preference for money (Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2010). Education, like status, is instead related to the respect in the eyes of others; people tend to infer social status from one's educational rank (e.g., Berger & Webster, 2006). Building off this distinction, to the extent that the effects of social class on cheating are driven by power, we expected that income would be stronger than education in predicting unethical behavior. In addition, in Experiment 2, we aimed to broaden our results by measuring people's propensity to engage in a variety of unethical behaviors (e.g., stealing, cheating, and deception).

Pretest

We adapted scenarios successfully used in past research (Detert et al., 2008). Specifically, we kept the original scenarios that depicted self-beneficial unethical behaviors, but we created a modified version of the original eight scenarios to feature an actor engaged in an unethical behavior for the benefit of another person (e.g., lying to help protect an acquaintance; see Appendix A for a full list of self- and other-beneficial scenarios). We conducted a pretest to verify that our self-beneficial versus other-beneficial scenarios did not differ in how unethical or immoral they were viewed.

Forty participants (19 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 27.15$, $SD = 10.78$) from a major European metropolitan area were presented with a series of scenarios (see Appendix A) and asked to rate the extent to which they perceived the action performed in the scenario as ethical versus unethical, moral versus immoral, self-beneficial versus other-beneficial, and selfish versus altruistic. We conducted four repeated measured ANOVAs with Scenario as a repeated factor and Beneficiary as a between factor. Participants perceived self-beneficial ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 2.02$) and other-beneficial scenarios ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.97$) as equally unethical, $F < 1$. Similarly, they perceived self-beneficial ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.98$) and other-beneficial scenarios ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 2.00$) as equally immoral, $F < 1$. Behaviors featured in self-beneficial scenarios, however, were perceived as more self-oriented ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.58$) than behaviors featured in other-beneficial scenarios ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 2.08$), $F(1, 38) = 52.26$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .58$. Similarly, behaviors featured in self-beneficial scenarios were perceived as more selfish ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.75$) than those in other-beneficial scenarios ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 2.17$), $F(1, 38) = 29.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .43$. No other significant effects or interactions across scenarios emerged. Thus, the behaviors differed on beneficiary and selfishness but not on their overall level of ethicality.

Method

Eighty-one participants (50 female; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.67$, $SD = 12.33$) were randomly assigned to respond to the self-beneficial or the other-beneficial scenarios pretested. Participants belonged to the same population as the one pretest (i.e., inhabitants of a major European metropolitan area).

Social class measures. We measured education and income (see Figure 3 for distribution of responses). Annual family household income was assessed and coded into eight categories: (a) $<€10,999$, (b) $€11,000$ to $€20,999$, (c) $€21,000$ to $€30,999$, (d) $€31,000$ to $€40,999$, (e) $€41,000$ to $€50,999$, (f) $€51,000$ to $€60,999$, (g) $€61,000$ to $€70,999$, and (h) $>€71,000$. Education was coded into four categories: (a) did not finish high school, (b) high school graduate or some college attendance, (c) college graduate, or (d) postgraduate degree (Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Piff et al., 2010). Preliminary results revealed that income was significantly correlated with education (Pearson $r = .26$, $p = .18$) and with age (Pearson $r = .28$, $p = .009$). Education and age were not correlated in the sample (Pearson $r = .08$, $p = .46$).

Unethical behavior measure. Participants were also asked the extent to which they would engage in the eight behaviors described in the pretest. The order of the scenarios, as well as whether participants were presented with demographics questions or the unethical scenarios first, did not affect unethical behavior ($F < 1$).

Results and Discussion

Unethical behavior. A regression predicting the propensity to engage in unethical behavior with beneficiary (0 = other-beneficial; 1 = self-beneficial), income, and education entered on the first step, and the Income \times Beneficiary and Education \times Beneficiary interactions entered on the second step, revealed a marginally significant effect of beneficiary ($B = .22$, $SE = .11$, $p = .057$),

such that participants engaged in unethical behavior more for their own benefit than for that of another person. There was no direct effect of income ($B = -.11, SE = .11, p = .33$) or education ($B = .05, SE = .11, p = .64$) on unethical behavior. However, a significant Beneficiary \times Income interaction emerged ($B = 1.30, SE = .25, p < .001$), whereas the Education \times Beneficiary interaction was not significant ($B = .10, SE = .30, p = .73$). The Beneficiary \times Income interaction remained significant after controlling for age and participant sex ($B = 1.33, SE = .25, p < .001$). An examination within the self-beneficial and other-beneficial condition revealed that income positively predicted participants' likelihood to engage in unethical behavior for the self ($B = .51, SE = .13, p = .001$) but negatively predicted participants' likelihood to engage in unethical behavior for another person ($B = -.53, SE = .13, p < .001$).

Spotlight analyses. Next, we next conducted spotlight analyses (Fitzsimons, 2008; Irwin & McClelland, 2001) to observe the effects of our lie beneficiary within high-income individuals (one standard deviation above the average income level, $M = 6.00$) and low-income individuals (one standard deviation below the average income level, $M = 2.22$). High-income individuals ($+1 SD$) were significantly more likely to cheat for themselves than for others, $B = 2.03, SE = 0.35, t(77) = 5.67, p < .001$ (see Figure 4). In contrast, low-income individuals ($-1 SD$) were significantly more likely to cheat for others than for themselves, $B = -.79, SE = 0.35, t(77) = 2.22, p = .029$.

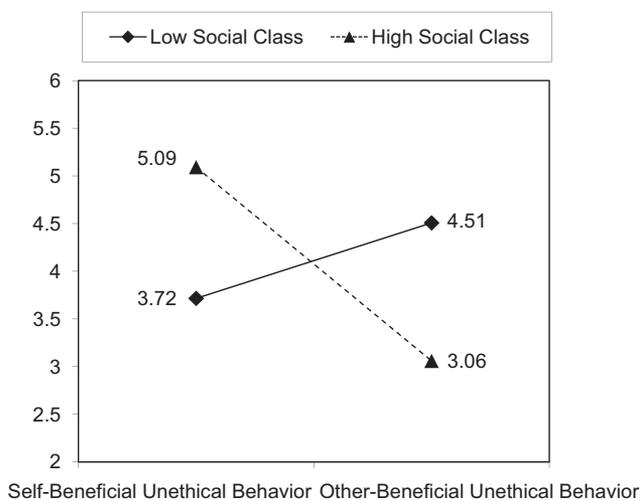
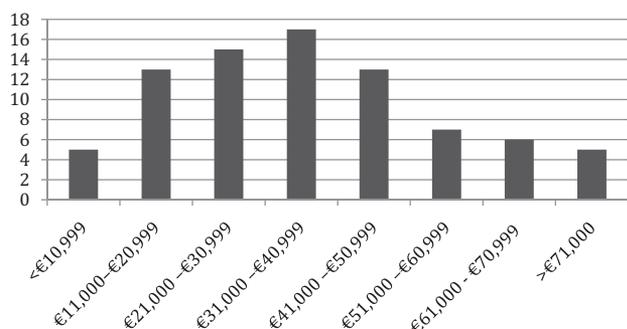


Figure 4. Experiment 2: Likelihood to engage in unethical behavior as a function of social class at $\pm 1 SD$.

These results replicate Experiment 1 and demonstrate that income, but not education, interacted with the beneficiary to determine unethical behavior. This result suggests that not all antecedents of social class contribute equally to unethical behavior. The fact that income, a difference in resources, was more influential than education provides indirect support for our proposition that social class affects unethical behavior through power. We turn to examine more directly the role of power in the next set of experiments.

Distribution of income scores, Experiment 2



Distribution of education scores, Experiment 2

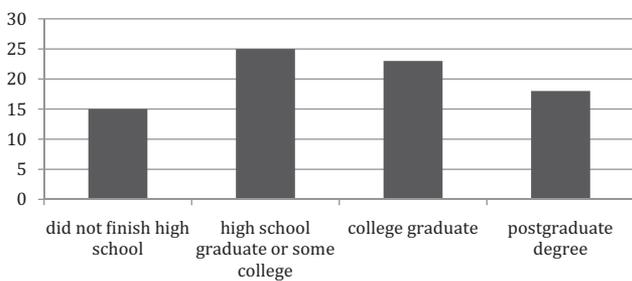


Figure 3. Histograms reflecting the distribution of income (top) and education (bottom) scores collected in Experiment 2.

Experiment 3: The Mediating Role of Power

Experiment 3 tested power as a potential mechanism to explain the effects of social class on engaging in unethical behavior for oneself or another. Experiment 3 also examined whether these effects might have been triggered by another component of hierarchical differentiation: one's sense of status (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). As indicated previously, whereas power refers to having or lacking resources in social relations, status speaks to the level of respect one has in the eyes of others (Hyman, 1942; Ridgeway & Correll, 2006). Recent research has found that the tendency to focus on the self may be a more prevalent consequence of power relative to status (Blader & Chen, 2012). With regard to unethical behavior, feelings of respect may not relate to unethical behavior because engaging in any immorality, even if it benefits someone else, may lead to the loss of respect. Thus, we predicted that status would not mediate the relationship between social class and unethical behavior. If contrast, we predicted that sense of power would mediate the effects of social class on unethical behavior.

Method

One hundred twenty-five participants (68 female; $M_{age} = 33.17, SD = 11.14$) were randomly assigned to respond to the self-beneficial or the other-beneficial scenarios. This experiment was conducted in the field with the help of a research assistant, who individually approached inhabitants of a European suburban area for their participation in the survey.

Unethical behavior measure. We first presented participants with the scenarios used in Experiment 2. Participants were asked the extent to which they would engage in the behavior described. Because there were no interactions with order of scenarios ($F < 1$), we created an index of unethical behavior ($\alpha = .78$).

Sense of power and status. We next assessed participants' chronic sense of power ($\alpha = .90$) and sense of status ($\alpha = .83$) by adapting past scales (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Anderson, et al., 2012b; Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2012; see Appendix B for items).

Social class measure. We measured participants' social class using the ladder measure from Experiment 1 (Adler et al., 2000; see Figure 1 for distribution of responses to the scale).

Demographic information. Finally, we also collected demographic information related to participants' age and gender.

Results and Discussion

Unethical behavior. A regression was conducted on participants' propensity to engage in unethical behavior, with beneficiary (0 = other-beneficial; 1 = self-beneficial) and social class entered on the first step and the interaction entered on the second step. A significant effect of beneficiary was present ($B = .27$, $SE = .09$, $p = .002$), such that participants engaged in unethical behavior more for their own benefit than for that of another person. No effect of social class on unethical behavior was present ($B = .01$, $SE = .09$, $p = .90$). Of greatest importance, a significant Beneficiary \times Social Class interaction emerged ($B = .44$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$). Social class positively predicted participants' likelihood to engage in unethical behavior for oneself ($B = .45$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$). In contrast, social class negatively predicted the likelihood of engaging in unethical behavior for another person ($B = -.43$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$). The interaction remained significant when controlling for age and sex ($B = .45$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$).

Spotlight analyses. We conducted spotlight analyses (Fitzsimons, 2008; Irwin & McClelland, 2001) to observe the effects of lie beneficiary within high-social-class individuals (one standard deviation above the average income level, $M = 6.62$) and low-social-class individuals (one standard deviation below the average social class level, $M = 2.78$ on the 1–10 social class scale). Among high-social-class individuals, there was a significant tendency to cheat more for oneself than for others, $B = 1.56$, $SE = .23$, $t(121) = 6.57$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 5). Among low-social-class individuals (-1 SD), there was a marginally significant trend to cheat more for others than for themselves, $B = -.36$, $SE = 0.24$, $t(121) = 1.53$, $p = .12$.

Mediation analyses. Finally, we tested whether the influence of social class on participants' propensity to engage in unethical behavior was mediated by power and/or status. We conducted three tests of mediation, one taking into account the whole sample and one for each condition: self- and other-beneficial (see Figure 6).

First, we conducted a moderated mediation model with two mediators (power and status; Hayes, in press). The form of this moderated mediation model, consistent with our hypothesis, was that beneficiary would moderate the effect of power on unethical behavior. Results of this model revealed that power ($B = .17$, $SE = .09$, $p = .046$), but not status ($B = .03$, $SE = .08$, $p = .68$), predicted unethical behavior. Moreover, the Power \times Beneficiary

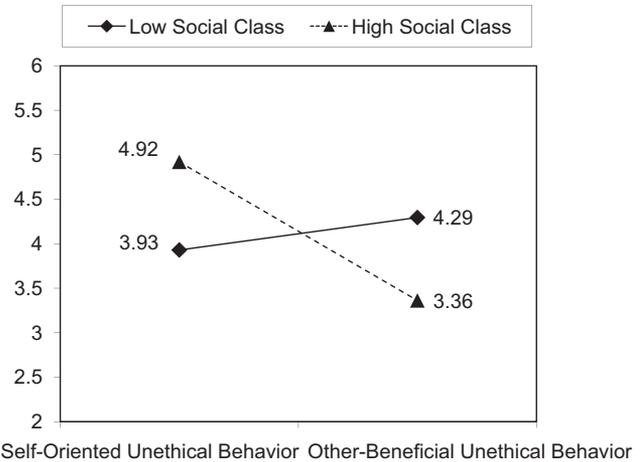


Figure 5. Experiment 3: Likelihood to engage in unethical behavior as a function of social class at ± 1 SD.

interaction significantly predicted unethical behavior ($B = .53$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$), but the Status \times Beneficiary interaction on unethical behavior was only marginally significant ($B = .13$, $SE = .07$, $p = .08$). Finally, the effect of social class was not significant when power and status were included in the model ($B = -.05$, $SE = .09$, $p = .57$). Finally, the conditional indirect effect involving power was significant (95% confidence interval [CI] [.34, .04]), but the conditional indirect effect involving status was not (95% CI [-.12, .02]).

Second, we separately tested whether power and status mediated the effect of social class on self-beneficial unethical behavior. This analysis revealed that social class predicted both power ($B = .25$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$) and status ($B = .23$, $SE = .08$, $p = .006$). However, only power significantly predicted self-beneficial unethical behavior ($B = .55$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$), whereas status did not ($B = .07$, $SE = .09$, $p = .43$). Last, this analysis revealed that after power was controlled for, the effect of social class on self-beneficial unethical behavior was no longer significant ($B = .10$, $SE = .07$, $p = .18$). Moreover, the indirect effect involving power was significant (95% CI [.05, .29]), as zero fell outside that confidence interval, whereas the indirect effect involving status was not significant (95% CI [-.03, .07]).

Third, we looked at whether power and status mediated the effect of social class on other-beneficial unethical behavior. Social class predicted both power ($B = .32$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$) and status ($B = .28$, $SE = .08$, $p < .001$). However, only power significantly predicted other-beneficial unethical behavior ($B = -.25$, $SE = .09$, $p < .01$), whereas status did not significantly predict other-beneficial unethical behavior ($B = -.02$, $SE = .08$, $p = .78$). This analysis revealed that the effect of social class on other-beneficial unethical behavior was reduced when power was controlled for ($B = -.15$, $SE = .06$, $p = .03$). The indirect effect involving power was significant (95% CI [-.21, -.006]), whereas the indirect effect involving status was not (95% CI [-.05, .03]).

Overall, the findings replicate the effect of social class on unethical behavior, but only when the unethical behavior benefited the self. The reverse effect occurred when the behavior benefited others. The novel finding from this experiment was that this effect

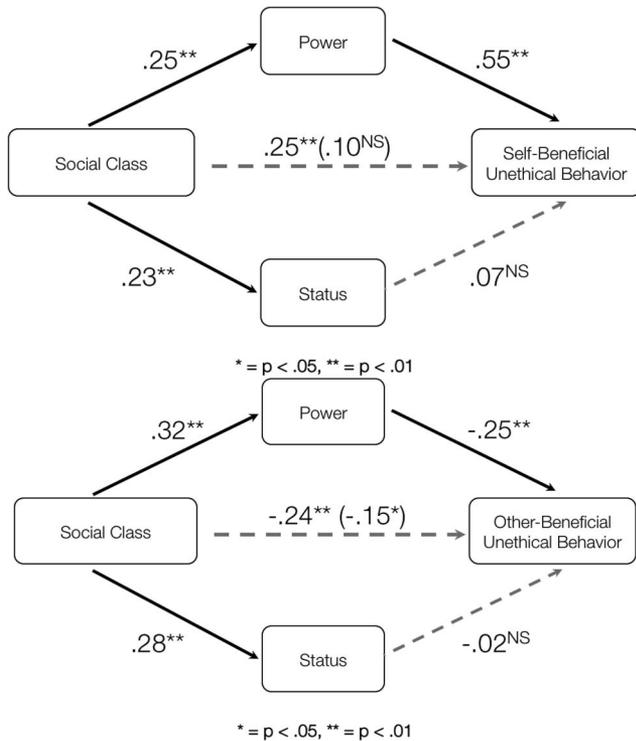


Figure 6. Experiment 3: Mediation analyses involving power and status on self-beneficial (top panel) and other-beneficial (bottom panel) unethical behavior.

was mediated by differences in participants' sense of power but not their sense of status.

Experiments 4, 5, and 6: The Experimental-Causal-Chain Approach

Because all variables were measured in Experiment 3, it is not possible to establish causality in our mediation, that is, we cannot definitively say that power drove the reported differences in unethical behavior. To address this inherent limitation and provide complementary evidence for the underlying role of power, Experiments 4, 5, and 6 used the experimental-causal-chain approach (Spencer et al., 2005). Experiment 4 manipulated social class and measured how it affects people's sense of power. Experiments 5 and 6 manipulated power and examined its effects on unethical behavior that either benefited the self or others. If differences in power underlie our effects, manipulating power should lead to the same behavioral tendencies as measured by differences in social class.

Experiment 4: Manipulating Social Class

Experiment 4 manipulated social class and measured its impact on sense of power.

Method. One hundred fifty participants (79 female; $M_{\text{age}} = 21.15$, $SD = 2.82$) were randomly assigned to a three-cells design (status: high-social-class vs. low-social-class vs. baseline). Participants, mostly students from a large European metropolitan area,

were invited to a research lab and were compensated about €6 for their participation in a 10-min task.

Social class manipulation. We adopted a social class manipulation used in past research (Anderson et al., 2012a). Specifically, participants in the high-social-class and low-social-class conditions were shown the 10-rungs ladder (Adler et al., 2000). Participants in the high-social-class condition completed a short reflection task, in which they were asked to compare themselves with the people at the very bottom rung of the ladder (i.e., the people who had the least money and education) and write a few lines on how they compared with these people. Participants in the low-social-class condition were asked to compare themselves with the people at the very top rung of the ladder (i.e., the people who had the most money and education). Participants in the baseline condition were not exposed to the ladder, nor were they asked to complete a writing task.

Power measure. Participants' power was assessed through two items adapted from past research (Dubois et al., 2010; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Specifically, participants reported the extent they felt powerful and in control on 7-point Likert scales (anchored at 1 = *powerless, lacking control*, and 7 = *powerful, in control*; $\alpha = .93$).

Results and discussion. A one-way ANOVA revealed a main effect of condition, $F(2, 147) = 13.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$, such that participants felt more powerful in the high-social-class condition ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.83$) than in the baseline ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.57$) and low-social-class ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.48$) conditions. Post hoc tests revealed that participants felt significantly more powerful in the high-social-class condition than in the baseline condition, $F(1, 147) = 6.26$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. In addition, participants felt significantly less powerful in the low-social-class condition than in the baseline condition, $F(1, 147) = 7.05$, $p = .009$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. In other words, making people feel high in social class increased their feelings of power, but making people feel low in social class decreased these feelings.

Experiment 5: Manipulating Power

In Experiment 5, we directly manipulated power and expected that high power would increase self-beneficial unethical behavior, but low power would increase other-beneficial unethical behavior, similar to the behavioral tendencies triggered by differences in social class (Experiments 1 through 3).

Method. One hundred twenty-one participants (59 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.56$, $SD = 1.17$) were randomly assigned to a 3 (power: high vs. low vs. baseline) \times 2 (lie beneficiary: self vs. other) between-subjects design. Participants were students of a large Midwestern University participating in a lab study in exchange for \$12.

Power manipulation. Participants completed two independent tasks in the lab. In the first task, participants completed a power recall task (Galinsky et al., 2003) that has been widely used to elicit differences in feelings of power (for reviews, see Galinsky et al., 2015; Rucker et al., 2012). In the high-power condition, participants wrote about a time they had power. In the low-power condition, participants wrote about a time they lacked power. In the baseline condition, participants wrote about the last time they went to the grocery store.

Unethical behavior measure. Participants then completed a second task, portrayed as a decision-making task for the psychology department. They were presented with a series of three scenarios in

which they had the opportunity to lie about something (e.g., explaining why a paper was not handed in on time; see Appendix C). In the lie-on-behalf-of-self condition, their decision to lie would benefit them. In contrast, in the lie-on-behalf-of-other condition, the decision to lie would benefit another person. In the lie-on-behalf-of-other condition, in order to remove self-orientated motivations, it was highlighted that lying would have no consequence whatsoever on the participant if the lie were discovered. Respondents were assured that their responses would be confidential and not used to evaluate them personally in any way. The dependent variable was participants' likelihood to lie, on a scale from 1 to 9, with higher numbers indicating a greater tendency to lie.

Manipulation checks. We conducted a manipulation check by having participants respond to the question, "The event recall task made me feel: powerful (vs.) powerless" on a 9-point scale. In addition to the power manipulation, we included a measure of mood: "The event recall task made me feel happy (vs.) sad" on a 9-point scale. Doing so allowed us to rule out an alternative mechanism of negative mood for the finding that low-social-class individuals engage more in other-beneficial unethical behavior (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973).

Results and discussion.

Manipulation checks. An ANOVA on the power manipulation check revealed a main effect of power, $F(2, 115) = 31.69, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .35$. Low-power participants reported feeling less powerful ($M = 3.22, SD = 1.14$) than baseline participants ($M = 4.02, SD = 1.49$) and high-power participants ($M = 5.75, SD = 1.68$). There was no effect of lie type, $F < 1$, or a Lie Type \times Power interaction, $F(2, 115) = 1.08, p = .34, \eta_p^2 = .02$, on the manipulation check.

On the mood item, there was no effect of power, $F < 1$, lie type, $F(2, 115) = 1.31, p = .25, \eta_p^2 = .01$, or the Power \times Lie Type interaction, $F(2, 115) = 1.50, p = .23, \eta_p^2 = .02$. All of the significant interaction and simple effects on lying held when controlling for mood, $ps < .01$.

Unethical behavior. We examined the effect of power and lie type on participants' likelihood to lie (see Table 2 for means). A two-way ANOVA revealed a main effect of lie type, $F(2, 115) = 11.03, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .09$, such that participants were more likely to lie for themselves ($M = 4.29, SD = 1.62$) than for another person ($M = 3.44, SD = 1.42$). There was no effect of power, $F < 1$. Of most importance, there was a significant Power \times Lie Type interaction, $F(2, 115) = 13.03, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .18$. High-power participants were more likely to lie for themselves compared with baseline participants, $F(1, 115) = 7.45, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .06$, and low-power participants, $F(1, 115) = 20.72, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$. Baseline participants were marginally different from low-power participants, $F(1, 115) = 3.52, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .03$. In contrast, low-power participants were more likely to lie for others compared

with both baseline participants, $F(1, 115) = 6.57, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$, and high-power participants, $F(1, 115) = 8.45, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .07$; baseline participants did not differ from that of high-power participants, $F < 1$. Consistent with the overall main effect, participants were more likely to lie for themselves than for another in the baseline condition, $F(1, 115) = 6.04, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$.

The results of Experiment 5 replicate the same pattern found for social class in earlier experiments but with a power manipulation instead. Similar to upper class individuals, participants randomly assigned to a high-power condition were more likely to act unethically when doing so benefited the self. In contrast, and similar to lower class individuals, participants randomly assigned to a low-power condition were more likely to act unethically when doing so benefited others.

Experiment 6: Manipulated Power and Lying Behavior

Our final experiment sought further support for the role of power in the causal chain connecting social class to unethical behavior by examining whether manipulated power yielded similar effects when participants had the opportunity to tell an actual lie. Similar to Experiment 1, we wanted to demonstrate that our results were not limited to scenario-based or hypothetical scenarios.

Method. One hundred twenty-two participants (70 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.51, SD = 1.17$) were randomly assigned to a 2 (power: high vs. low) \times 2 (lie type: on behalf of self vs. another) between-subjects design as part of a lab study. Similar to Experiment 1, participants, mostly students from a large European metropolitan area, were invited to a research lab and were compensated about €6 for their participation to a 10-min task.

Power manipulation. Participants' power was manipulated by asking them to imagine what it would be like to be in the position of a boss (high power) or an employee (low power; Dubois et al., 2010).

Unethical behavior measure. Next, participants were told the computer would randomly assign them (behalf-of-self condition) or the next participant (behalf-of-other condition) to an undesirable, boring, repetitive, and unimaginative task (i.e., fill out a questionnaire) or a desirable, fun, engaging, and creative task (i.e., cocreate a product) by displaying "1" or "2," respectively. During this time, the experimenter was absent from the room. After 10 seconds, the computer screen froze, with no number visible on the screen. When the experimenter came back to the room, he asked participants what condition they (or the next participant) were assigned to. Importantly, all participants were assigned to the undesirable task ("1"). Thus, if participants answered "2," they were lying (either for oneself or another). Our dependent variable was whether participants answered "1" or "2" (recoded as 1 = lie; 0 = truth).²

Manipulation check. A one-item manipulation check on a 9-point scale ("The task made me feel: powerful – powerless") was

Table 2
Mean Likelihood of Lying for Oneself or Another as a Function of Power Condition, Experiment 5

	Low power Mean (SD)	Baseline Mean (SD)	High power Mean (SD)
Lying for oneself	3.36 (1.39)	4.25 (1.45)	5.22 (1.53)
Lying for another	4.23 (1.44)	3.11 (1.31)	2.96 (1.20)

² We also varied the framing of the task to which participants were assigned. Specifically, in one condition, we mentioned that "2" being displayed would mean the target participant would have indirectly *avoided* a boring task for themselves (or the next participant). In contrast, in a second condition, we mentioned that "2" being displayed would mean the target participant would have indirectly *chosen* a fun task for themselves (or the next participant). This manipulation did not alter our primary results in any way and is therefore not discussed further.

placed at the end of the experiment, with higher numbers reflecting greater power.

Results and discussion.

Manipulation check. An ANOVA on the power item revealed a main effect of power, $F(1, 114) = 43.75, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27$, such that low-power participants reported feeling less powerful ($M = 3.47, SD = 1.76$) than high-power participants ($M = 5.32, SD = 1.32$). No other effects were significant, $ps > .14$.

Unethical behavior. We examined the effect of power, lie type, and their interaction on participants' decision to lie or not. There were no main effects, $ps > .11$. However, a logistic regression revealed a significant Power \times Lie interaction, $B = .78, SE = .27, Wald \chi^2(1) = 8.17, p = .004$. High-power participants were more likely to lie on behalf of themselves (21 times out of 33, or 63%) than on behalf of others (10 times out of 28, or 35%), $\chi^2(1) = 4.73, p = .03$. In contrast, low-power participants were more likely to lie on behalf of others (17 times out of 30, or 56%) than on behalf of themselves (10 times out of 31, or 32%), $\chi^2(1) = 3.68, p = .05$. Overall, the results replicate the causal role of power in Experiment 5 and link power to actual unethical behavior.

General Discussion

Six experiments offer a key clarification to our understanding of the relationship between social class and unethical behavior. Experiments 1 and 2 demonstrated that upper class individuals were more prone to engage in unethical behavior for themselves, replicating the work by Piff et al. (2012). In contrast, lower class individuals were more prone to engage in unethical behavior for another person. Whether unethical behavior serves the self or others is therefore a critical moderator of the relationship between social class and unethical behavior.

Our experiments also established the critical role of power. Experiment 2 demonstrated that a more power-based component of social class (i.e., income) better predicted unethical behavior than a status-based component (i.e., education). Experiment 3 found that sense of power mediated the effects of social class on unethical behavior, but sense of status did not. Experiments 4, 5, and 6 used the experimental-causal-chain approach and found that manipulating social class affected people's sense of power (Experiment 4), and manipulating power replicated the same pattern on unethical behavior that we found with social class (Experiments 5 and 6).

Contributions of the Present Research for Unethical Behavior

The current research provides a crucial clarification on the relationship between social class and unethical behavior. Both higher and lower social class individuals can engage in unethical behavior, but the target of that behavior might often differ: The unethical behavior of upper class individuals is more likely to be self-beneficial, whereas the unethical behavior of lower class individuals is more likely to be other-beneficial. This parsimonious account complements and qualifies recent work on social class and unethical behavior (Piff et al., 2012) by advancing the argument that the link between upper social class and unethical behavior occurs primarily for self-beneficial reasons.

In addition, we contribute to the literature on unethical behavior (Gino et al., 2009; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008) by distinguish-

ing, for the first time, between two forms of unethical behavior: self-beneficial and other-beneficial unethical behavior. This distinction offers a critical moderator to the main effect of power on unethical behavior (e.g., Carney et al., 2014; Lammers et al., 2010; Yap et al., 2013): When the beneficiary is another person, the powerful cheat *less*, not *more* (Experiments 5 and 6). Moreover, this work demonstrates that these two forms of unethical behavior may have different antecedents. Specifically, Carney et al. (2014) find that power buffers stress, which facilitates unethical behavior. In contrast, the present work suggests that social processes may also instigate unethical behavior. The powerful are more likely to lie to serve the self, whereas the powerless are more likely to lie to serve others.

The current work has made a number of important distinctions that we hope will lead to greater precision in the literatures on social hierarchy and unethical behavior. First, we have emphasized the conceptual distinction between selfish and unethical behavior. Although unethical behavior is often selfish, it needs not be. By making this conceptual distinction, we can consider the different antecedents of selfish and unethical behavior. Second, our work further distinguishes between power and status. Finally, our work demonstrates that two variables that are conceptually distinct—social class and power—are in fact tightly linked.

Contributions of the Present Research for Social Class and Agency Versus Communion

Our findings suggest that social class can bestow a psychological sense of power on individuals. This implies that, at least in some circumstances, social class exerts an effect on behavior via an experience of power. Specifically, our data suggests that low social class can prompt people to feel powerless, resulting in cognitive and behavioral tendencies previously found to be associated with powerlessness, that is, a greater focus on others. In contrast, high social class makes people feel powerful, resulting in cognitive and behavioral tendencies previously linked with powerfulness, such as greater focus on self (Rucker et al., 2011, 2012).

At the same time, the present research suggests that not all antecedents of social class may affect power. Specifically, Experiment 2 demonstrated that income, which is linked to one's resources, and thus power, affected unethical behavior, but education, which is less clearly tethered to resources, did not. An important consequence of this observation is that different antecedents of social class may affect the psyche of an individual in distinct ways. Although it may be true that different measures and manipulations of social class have common effects on behavior (Piff et al., 2012), it may nonetheless be important to understand the unique effects driven by the different substrates that give rise to one's social class.

Our results also lend credence to the respective links between high power and an agentic focus, and low power and a communal focus (Rucker et al., 2012). Moreover, our findings bear implications for how a communal focus impacts individuals' behaviors. Specifically, past work has often investigated situations in which a communal focus accompanying powerlessness or a lack of resources lead people to "do good." For instance, the powerless spend more money on others than themselves (Rucker et al., 2011; Experiment 2), and the poor tend to spend more on social activities (e.g., weddings; Banerjee & Duflo, 2007) and charity (Piff et al.,

2010). In contrast, our work shows that the powerlessness-induced focus on others can lead them to “do evil” by engaging in actions that others perceive as immoral or bad. We encourage future work to further investigate when a communal focus might lead people to increase others’ welfare and when it might hinder it.

Limitations

The present work is not without limitations. First, the experimental procedures linking social class to unethical behavior focused on measures of social class rather than manipulating the construct. As a result, unknown is whether momentary of one’s social class would produce the same effects on unethical behavior. However, given that past work on social class has found similar effects for measures and manipulations of social class (e.g., Anderson et al., 2012a), and the fact that Experiment 4 demonstrates that a manipulation of social class had a direct effect on sense of power, we anticipate similar findings.

Second, although we found robust findings across two continents (Europe and America), an open question is how the communal focus typically associated with Eastern cultures might affect the current findings. Given a communal focus can make high-power people more attentive to others and potentially increase their feelings of responsibility (Chen et al., 2001), one might expect that in Eastern cultures, the main effect of power on unethical behavior might reverse. That is, empowering individuals might fuel their naturally salient communal focus and increase lying on behalf of others relative to the self. We believe this to be a valuable direction for future research.

Third, one might conclude that our findings stem from the tendency for low-social-class or low-power individuals to avoid lying for the self because they believe that they have a higher chance to be caught in the self-beneficial condition than in the other-beneficial condition. This concern is mitigated by the fact that we explicitly told participants in Experiment 5 that lying would have no consequences for them if the lie were discovered. Nonetheless, we recognize that the fear of being caught might serve as an additional pathway that might impact people’s likelihood to engage in unethical behavior. We encourage future work to further unpack the interplay of different factors that intermingle to affect people’s propensity to lie.

Finally, although we demonstrated that power mediated the effects of social class on lying, we want to reinforce the point that this should not be taken as evidence that social class can be distilled to power. Indeed, Experiment 2 demonstrated that education, a contributor of social class, did not yield similar effects, suggestive of the independence of the broader social class construct and power. Indeed, power might be but one pathway by which social class can impact people’s thoughts and behaviors. Also of interest, one possibility is that both social class and power can be abstracted to a broader construct of social hierarchy or rank-based processes and, in some cases, affect behavior through this broader lens.

Future Directions

Our findings raise the possibility that policymakers might combat unethical behavior by recognizing the specific antecedents of wrongdoing by the rich and the poor. For example, preventative

messages targeted at the upper classes and the powerful may want to warn against the potential harm unethical behavior has for the self (i.e., “Your cheating will harm you in the end”). In contrast, preventative messages targeted at the lower classes might warn against the potential harm unethical behavior has for others (i.e., “Your cheating will harm others in the end”). Examining whether such message framing could reduce unethical behavior by different populations seems to be an interesting direction for future research.

Our findings also suggest that social class steers unethical behavior in systematic ways. One reason for these differences might be evolutionary. Bending the rules for the self would have helped the privileged maintain their rank. In contrast, circumventing the rules on behalf of others might have allowed the unprivileged to form stronger social bonds that were crucial to survive with limited resources. Bending the rules on behalf of others may have created coalition partners that could one day help the underprivileged rise up and collectively challenge authority. Future research could probe deeper into the evolutionary roots of rank and additional implications beyond unethical behavior.

Finally, it is important to note that “lying for others” may not be the only case that leads the powerful to lie less than those without power. An important aspect of power is that it validates whatever goals people have in mind (Chen et al., 2001; Demarree et al., 2012; Williams, 2014). Some individuals may be naturally other-focused; in other cases, they might have a chronic goal to favor in-group members, possibly with the view that it might strengthen their own power. In such cases, power may actually increase their likelihood of lying for others. This possibility points to the importance of understanding the variety of processes by which power operates, as these may shed additional insight on the link between social class, power, and unethical behavior.

Conclusion

The current research has established a nuanced, systematic, and parsimonious relationship between social class, power, and unethical behavior. High social class does not inherently lead to unethical behavior but instead predicts tendencies to behave selfishly. In contrast, low social class can lead to unethical behavior, but more so when it benefits others. Furthermore, these effects of social class appear to stem from differences in power. It turns out that the question of whether the rich are more unethical than the poor may not be the right question. Rather, a better question seems to be, when are the rich versus the poor unethical?

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(Appendices follow)

Appendix A

Experiments 2 and 3: Self-Beneficial Versus Other-Beneficial Scenarios and Scales

A. Self-Beneficial Scenarios (Detert et al., 2008)

1. You work in a fast-food restaurant downtown. It's against policy to eat food without paying for it. You came straight from classes and are therefore hungry. No one is around in the restaurant, so you make something for yourself and eat it without paying.
2. You work as an office assistant for a department at your university. You're alone in the office making copies and realize you're out of copy paper at home. You therefore slip a ream of paper into your backpack.
3. You're preparing for the final exam in a class where the professor uses the same exam in both sections. Some of your classmates somehow get a copy of the exam after the first section. They are now trying to memorize the right answers. You don't look at the exam, but just ask them what topics you should focus your studying on.
4. 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.
5. You get your final exam back and you notice that the professor has marked correct three answers that you got wrong. Revealing his error would mean the difference between an A and a B. You say nothing.
6. Your accounting course requires you to purchase a software package that sells for \$50. Your friend, who is also in the class, has already bought the software and offers to lend it to you. You take it and load it onto your computer.
7. You need to get confidential information about a competitor's product. You therefore pose as a student on the phone doing a research project on the competitor's company and ask for the information.
8. You are assigned a team project in one of your courses. Your team waits until the last minute to begin working. Several team members suggest using an old project out of their fraternity/sorority files. You go along with this plan.

B. Other-Beneficial Scenarios

1. You work in a fast-food restaurant downtown. It's against policy to eat food without paying for it. A friend

came straight from classes and is hungry. No one is around in the restaurant, so you make something for him and give it to him without making him pay.

2. You work as an office assistant for a department at your university. You're alone in the office making copies and realize that an acquaintance of yours is out of copy paper at home. You therefore slip a ream of paper into your backpack to give to your friend.
3. A friend of yours is preparing for a final exam in a class where the professor uses the same exam in both sections. Some of your classmates somehow get a copy of the exam after the first section. They are now trying to memorize the right answers. You don't look at the exam, but just ask them what topics your friend should focus his studying on.
4. You've waited in line for 10 minutes to buy a coffee and muffin at Starbucks for a friend of yours. 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 give these to your friend who savors the coffee, muffin and free \$10.
5. You get a classmate's final exam back (your friend is absent today) and you notice that the professor has marked correct three answers that your classmate got wrong. Revealing his error would mean the difference between an A and a B. You say nothing.
6. An acquaintance of yours' accounting course requires him to purchase a software package that sells for \$50. You (also in the class) have already bought the software and offer to lend it to you. You take it and load it onto their computer.
7. A colleague needs to get confidential information about a competitor's product. You therefore pose as a student on the phone doing a research project on the competitor's company and ask for the information.
8. Your friend is assigned a team project in one of your courses. Their team waits until the last minute to begin working. Several team members suggest using an old project out of their fraternity/sorority files. You find an old file and help them with this plan.

(Appendices continue)

Appendix B

Experiment 3: Sense of Power Scale ($\alpha = .90$) and Sense of Status ($\alpha = .83$), adapted from past scales (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Anderson, et al., 2012b; Dubois et al., 2012)

1. Sense of Power Scale

I can get people to listen to what I say.
 My wishes don't carry much weight.
 I can get others to do what I want.
 Even if I voice them, my views have little sway.
 I think I have a great deal of power.
 My ideas and opinions are often ignored.
 Even when I try, I am not able to get my way.
 If I want to, I get to make the decisions.

2. Sense of Status Scale

I feel prominent in society.
 People have a great deal of respect for me.
 People generally admire me.
 I feel I have a higher social standing than others.
 I feel higher up in the social ladder than others.

Appendix C

Experiment 5: Self-Beneficial Versus Other-Beneficial Scenarios

A. Paper Scenario

Lie on behalf of oneself. "Imagine that you were supposed to hand in an important paper for a class. You did not hand it in because you forgot. You are asked why you did not hand in the paper. If you tell the truth (i.e., you forgot), you will fail the class; If you report that you missed the assignment due to a personal health issue, you will pass the class: how likely would you be to report that you missed the assignment because of a health issue?"

Lie on behalf of another. "Imagine that an acquaintance of yours was supposed to hand in an important paper for a class. He did not hand it in because he forgot. He's not in, and you are asked why he did not hand the paper. If you tell the truth (i.e., he forgot), he will fail the class; If you report that he missed the assignment due to a personal health issue, he will pass the class: how likely would you be to report that your acquaintance missed the assignment because of a health issue?"

B. Tax Scenario

Lie on behalf of oneself. "Imagine that you were supposed to hand in an important tax form. You did not hand it in because you forgot. You receive a call from the administration inquiring why you did not hand in the tax form. If you tell the truth (i.e., you forgot), you will pay a fine, in addition to your normal taxes; If you report that you missed the deadline due to a personal health issue, you will not be fined: how likely would you be to report that you missed the deadline because of a health issue?"

Lie on behalf of another. "Imagine that an acquaintance of yours was supposed to hand in an important tax form. He did not hand it in because he forgot. He's not in, and you receive a call from the administration inquiring why he did not hand in the paper.

If you tell the truth (i.e., he forgot), he will pay a fine, in addition to his normal taxes; If you report that he missed the deadline due to a personal health issue, he will not be fined: how likely would you be to report that your acquaintance missed the deadline because of a health issue?"

C. Post Office Scenario

Lie on behalf of oneself. "Imagine that you were supposed to go to the post office to mail an important document to renew your driving license. You did not mail it because you were abroad on vacation. You receive a call from the DMV inquiring about the document. If you tell the truth (i.e., you were abroad on vacation), your license will not be renewed; If you report that you missed the deadline due to a personal health issue, your license will be renewed: how likely would you be to report that you missed the deadline because of a health issue?"

Lie on behalf of another. "Imagine that an acquaintance of yours was supposed to go to the post office to mail an important document to renew her driving license. She did not hand it because she was abroad on vacation. She's not in, and you receive a call from the DMV inquiring about the document. If you tell the truth (i.e., she was abroad on vacation), her license will not be renewed; If you report that she missed the deadline due to a personal health issue, her license will be renewed: how likely would you be to report that your acquaintance missed the deadline because of a health issue?"

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