

# Emerging Adulthood

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

---

## Unmasking Class: How Upwardly Mobile Poor and Working-Class Emerging Adults Negotiate an "Invisible" Identity

Kimberley Radmacher and Margarita Azmitia

*Emerging Adulthood* 2013 1: 314 originally published online 12 September 2013

DOI: 10.1177/2167696813502478

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://eax.sagepub.com/content/1/4/314>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



[Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood](#)

**Additional services and information for *Emerging Adulthood* can be found at:**

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

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

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

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

>> [Version of Record](#) - Nov 14, 2013

[OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Sep 12, 2013

[What is This?](#)

# Unmasking Class: How Upwardly Mobile Poor and Working-Class Emerging Adults Negotiate an “Invisible” Identity

Emerging Adulthood  
1(4) 314-329  
© 2013 Society for the  
Study of Emerging Adulthood  
and SAGE Publications  
Reprints and permission:  
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/2167696813502478  
ea.sagepub.com



Kimberley Radmacher<sup>1</sup> and Margarita Azmitia<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This study examined class identity negotiation among upwardly mobile poor and working-class emerging adults. Twenty-one ethnically diverse emerging adults narrated class-related experiences during interviews about their transition to college. Narratives were coded for (1) the strategies emerging adults used to make sense of their class experiences and (2) the events that prompted their class identity negotiation. Participants used class identity management strategies that reflected dissociation or resistance. Cross-class interactions that involved recognition of financial and behavioral disparities between themselves and their professional class peers were more likely to trigger both dissociation and resistance strategies. In contrast, noncomparative class-related experiences (e.g., parent loss of job) and same-class interactions were more likely to elicit dissociation strategies. These findings highlight the struggle and feelings of ambivalence that upwardly mobile emerging adults face as they manage the stigma and discrimination associated with their class background and protect their self-esteem.

## Keywords

identity, coping, resilience, transitions to adulthood, narrative, peers

Class identity refers to one's subjective experience of and affiliation with a particular social class and the meaning social class holds for one's sense of self (Jones, 2003). Adolescents' and adults' awareness and understanding of class status and class boundaries have long been researched by social and developmental psychologists and other social scientists (e.g., Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008; Bettie, 2003; Bullock & Limbert, 2003; Fine & Weis, 1998; 2003; Leahy, 1983; MacLeod, 1995; Oyserman, Johnson, & James, 2011; Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-DeBrito, 2009). Social psychologists, for example, have examined poor and working-class adolescents' and adults' class identification or categorization with their social class positioning (e.g., Bullock & Limbert, 2003; Hurtado, Gurin, & Peng, 1994; Langhout, 2005). In addition, researchers from several disciplines have highlighted how both social structures of power and cultural practices embedded in local class cultures not only foster the reproduction of class inequalities but also influence the subjective experiences of class and the development of class identities among poor and working-class adolescents and adults (e.g., Azmitia et al., 2008; Bettie, 2003; MacLeod, 1995; Orbe, 2008; Schwartz et al., 2009).

A growing body of research has begun to explore the “exceptions to the rule” (Bettie, 2003) of class reproduction by examining the subjective experiences of upwardly mobile poor and working-class individuals who study, live, or work in middle-class contexts (Azmitia et al., 2008; Granfield, 1991; Kaufman, 2003; Langhout, 2005; Orbe, 2008; Ostrove, 2003; Roberts

& Rossenwald, 2001). These researchers have investigated the processes and mechanisms through which social class influences the everyday lives of adolescents and adults and how these individuals construct and manage their social class identities and the intersections between their social class identities and other identity domains such as career, gender, and ethnicity or race. The present study drew on research and theory in developmental and social psychology to examine the processes involved in emerging adults' negotiation of social class identity. We contribute to the extant research by integrating the processes involved in both personal and social identity negotiation to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how upwardly mobile, poor, and working-class emerging adults make sense of social class in their everyday lives.

## *Class Identity: A Developmental Approach*

Prior research on social identity development, and in particular, ethnic identity development, has drawn on the Eriksonian

<sup>1</sup>Child Development Program, California State University, Dominguez Hills, CA, USA

<sup>2</sup>Psychology Department, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Kimberley Radmacher, PhD, Child Development Program, California State University, Dominguez Hills, 1000 E. Victoria Street, Carson, CA 90747, USA.  
Email: kradmacher@csudh.edu

concepts of identity exploration and commitment as mechanisms of identity negotiation (cf., Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Erikson (1968) proposed that identity formation begins with a sense of self-awareness regarding a particular aspect of the self, or identity domain (e.g., career, relationships), that prompts the adolescent or emerging adult to question who they are and who they want to or do not want to become within that domain. Although self-awareness is primarily conceptualized as an intrapsychic conflict resolution process, a particular event or sequence of events that the emerging adults either explore on their own (e.g., attending a cultural fair to learn more about one's own ethnic background) or are imposed on them by others (e.g., instances of racial discrimination; a conversation about the future with family and friends) can trigger the self-awareness process (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). By grappling with competing self-concepts, emerging adults attempt to resolve the tensions or conflicts between these selves and commit to one or more of the available identity options (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Erikson, 1968).

Although social class awareness begins in childhood (Oyserman et al., 2011), social class becomes especially salient for upwardly mobile adolescents and emerging adults as they begin to consider their futures during interactions with teachers and professional class friends and peers; these interactions may trigger the reflective processes that allow adolescents and emerging adults to develop theories about themselves and class in general and the possibility of upward mobility through education (Bettie, 2003; Jones, 2003; Orbe, 2008). Interactions in the professional class milieu (e.g., college) give upwardly mobile emerging adults an opportunity to learn professional class practices and lifestyles as well as recognize the disparity in resources between themselves and their more privileged peers (Langhout, Drake, & Rosselli, 2009; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2009). Cross-class interactions also expose upwardly mobile emerging adults to experiences of class and race discrimination. Disparities in socialization practices and resources and perceptions of discrimination can lead to feelings of distance and alienation from their professional class peers as well as call into question their class identity and the meaning it holds for their own sense of self (Azmitia et al., 2008; Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; Orbe, 2008; Ostrove & Long, 2007).

Social class identity becomes more complex when its perceived fluidity is juxtaposed with the markers of social class that serve to limit both real and perceived belonging along class lines (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Research on the experiences and achievements of upwardly mobile college students suggests that their disadvantaged class background and classism permeate not only their college experiences but also their career opportunities throughout adulthood (Langhout, Rosselli, & Feinstein, 2007; Langhout et al., 2009; Lott & Bullock, 2007). Class identity among upwardly mobile emerging adults is further complicated by the intersection of their class background with the class identity they are aspiring to attain. These distinct identities may elicit competing motivations or needs, which the upwardly mobile emerging adults feel the need to reconcile to form a coherent, authentic sense of self (Azmitia et al., 2008; Erikson, 1968; Orbe, 2008).

Research on upwardly mobile college students has shown that these emerging adults express a need to affiliate with and help the family and friends they grew up with despite their individual attempts at mobility (Orbe, 2008; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2009). However, the emerging adults' competing identity and affiliation needs can lead to feelings of ambivalence. Economic and educational gains acquired by upward mobility can place strains on relationships with family and friends who remain in the emerging adults' class of origin. While the family and friends of upwardly mobile students may be proud of the students' accomplishments, they often do not understand or value the knowledge and priorities of the world these students have entered (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001). This devaluation of their emerging identities leaves the emerging adults feeling a growing sense of distance and alienation from their family and friends and creates an identity tension that needs to be resolved (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; Orbe, 2008; Roberts & Rossenwald, 2001). The distance and alienation that upwardly mobile emerging adults feel at home and school can also increase their feelings of marginalization (Orbe, 2008). Investigating the strategies these emerging adults use to manage their feelings of marginalization and stigma may increase our understanding of the processes involved in class identity negotiation and play an important role in their well-being and adjustment to and persistence in college.

### *Negotiating an "Invisible" and Stigmatized Identity: CIMS*

In the United States, the belief that every American has an equal opportunity to pursue and achieve the "American Dream" through tenacity and hard work (i.e., the *Protestant Work Ethic*) perpetuates a strong belief in the permeability of class boundaries (Hochschild, 1995). The pervasiveness of this achievement ideology has rendered being poor or working class not only a stigmatized identity but also a controllable or chosen identity in the minds of most Americans (Granfield, 1991; Lott & Bullock, 2007). Even if some Americans believe that the poor and working class have no control over the onset of being a member of a lower class (e.g., born into poverty or loss of job), they believe that it is the responsibility of the poor and working class to improve their condition and attain the American Dream (Lott & Bullock, 2007). Many poor and working-class individuals may hold this belief themselves through their endorsement of the achievement ideology (cf., Bullock & Limbert, 2003). Moreover, it may be difficult for Americans to understand how class contours their lives because the majority either identify as middle class or believe that the United States is a classless society (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Coupled with a belief in meritocracy, the belief in classlessness renders social class as an "invisible," and concealable identity, in many social situations (Lott & Bullock, 2007; Quinn, 2006).

A substantial amount of research in psychology and sociology has examined the processes involved in negotiating a devalued social identity. Social identity theory posits that key elements of persons' self-concepts are derived from their affiliation with the various social groups to which they belong, including stigmatized identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social interactions and social

comparisons allow individuals to define their social identities by highlighting how they are similar to members of their own social group (i.e., in-group) and different from members of other groups (i.e., out-groups; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Feeling a connection to similar others through these in-group and out-group comparisons serves to enhance not only the individuals' collective self-esteem (i.e., how they feel about their social group) but also their personal self-esteem (i.e., how they feel about themselves; Brewer, 1991).

For stigmatized groups, upward social comparisons may not only reduce their collective self-esteem but also their desire to be a member of that group (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Stigmatized individuals, however, compensate for the potential reduction in self-esteem through the use of identity management strategies (Blanz, Mumme, Miele, & Klink, 1998). Identity management strategies can be differentiated as those that enhance individual or group status (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; see Blanz et al., 1998 for additional dimensions).

To deidentify with the negative attributes associated with a stigmatized identity, individuals may disengage either psychologically or behaviorally from their in-group (Niens & Cairns, 2003; Roberts, Settles, & Jellison, 2008; Tajfel, 1978). Individual strategies encompass these dissociation attempts and aim to enhance individuals' status and self-esteem, while the relative status of their in-group remains unchanged (Pagliaro, Alparone, Pacilli, & Mucchi-Faina, 2012). Roberts, Settles, and Jellison (2008) classified such strategies as *social recategorization* defined as "attempts to avoid categorization in a devalued social group and attempts to affiliate with an alternative, more highly regarded social group" (p. 273). Strategies that instantiate the dissociation process include individual mobility, assimilation, and concealing one's stigmatized identity (Goffman, 1963; Niens & Cairns, 2002; Quinn, 2006; Roberts et al., 2008; Tajfel, 1978).

In comparison, collective strategies involve cognitive and behavioral attempts to change the perceptions and social position of individuals' in-group (Pagliaro et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Tajfel and Turner (1986) posited that a sense of "positive distinctiveness" for one's social group could be attained through *social creativity* or *social competition strategies*. Social creativity strategies redefine or reformulate comparison dimensions to cognitively change the social position of one's in-group, creating a positive group perception and enhancing collective esteem (Pagliaro et al., 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals change the group they are compared to, change the value placed on a stigmatizing attribute, or make group comparisons based on another characteristic. *Social competition*, or *collective action*, strategies change the status relationship between the high-status and low-status groups (e.g., securing equal funding for schools and recreational programs in low-income neighborhoods; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Tajfel and Turner (1986) proposed four social creativity strategies: *subordinate recategorizations*, *superordinate recategorizations*, *reevaluating the comparison dimension*, and *new comparison dimension*. Subordinate recategorizations allow stigmatized individuals to divide their own group (e.g., poor and working class) into subgroups of varying status with their

new in-group (e.g., college-going peers) being of higher status than the new out-group (e.g., vocational track peers; Tajfel, 1978). Superordinate recategorizations allow individuals to view their own group and the high-status group as part of a larger social category where all group members have equal status (e.g., "we're all good students"; Tajfel, 1978). These two strategies allow individuals to change the group they are compared to rather than challenge the devalued attributes directly. In reevaluating the comparison dimension, individuals change the position of the two groups on an attribute that defines the difference between them by associating a positive meaning to their own group's position on the attribute and devalue the higher status group's position (e.g., "the wealthy are materialistic"; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). By creating a new comparison dimension, individuals compare themselves to the high-status group on an attribute that their low-status group scores higher (e.g., "working class values family"; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Prior research has shown that upwardly mobile students use the individual identity management strategies proposed by social identity researchers. Kaufman (2003), for example, found that working-class seniors reported engaging in "associational embracement" strategies (i.e., sharing middle, "professional" class ideologies) and self-presentation management (e.g., mimicking and endorsing middle-class speech patterns and dress) in their construction of a middle-class identity. Granfield (1991) also found that working-class law students concealed their working-class identities in their interpersonal relations with their professional class peers and believed that revealing their background would not only result in missed opportunities to engage in activities that were essential in their mobility efforts but also result in social rejection from these peers (see also, Ostrove, 2003). Moreover, Orbe (2008) noted the struggle that first-generation college (FGC) students experienced about whether they should make their FGC status visible to their peers, taking pride in their background and accomplishments, or whether they should assimilate, rendering their FGC status invisible to avoid the anticipated stigma attached to such an identity.

Upwardly mobile emerging adults may also use social creativity strategies to reduce the tension and stigma they feel in their class-based interactions at home and school (Ochberg & Comeau, 2001; Orbe, 2008; Ostrove & Long, 2007). The specific strategies that upwardly mobile emerging adults draw upon may vary depending on the context of the class-based experience and the social comparisons they make. It is possible that emerging adults may use one set of strategies to make sense of their experiences with their family and friends from their class of origin and another to explain their experiences with their professional class peers. The present study builds on prior research by examining both individual and collective identity management strategies among upwardly mobile poor and working-class emerging adults within a developmental framework. Using a qualitative, life story approach (cf., McAdams, 2001) allowed us to examine the personal experiences that prompted emerging adults' class awareness and to investigate the associations between the strategies used and the events or situations that prompted them.

## Identity Management Strategies and the Intersection of Multiple Social Identities

Class does not operate in isolation of other social identities (Azmitia et al., 2008; Bettie, 2002; Deaux & Perkins, 2001; Jones, 1998). Scholars from feminist studies (Collins, 1990; Fine & Weiss, 1998; Hurtado, 1996) and critical race theory (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005) have proposed that individuals are situated in multiple hierarchies of oppression (e.g., a Latina female, a poor African American male), which not only impact their experiences with disadvantage and privilege but also inform their subjective realities. Recent theory and research on personal and social identity posits that a person's social identities intersect, or interact, to create a unique position within the social structure of their communities and broader society (Azmitia et al., 2008; Deaux & Perkins, 2001; Pagliaro et al., 2012). Emerging adults may either infuse or separate their class identity with or from their ethnic or gender identity depending on their position in the social structure, including the social structure of their immediate environments (i.e., school setting) and the visibility of their oppressed identities. Jones (2003) suggested that while "class is distinct from race for poor and working-class Whites whose life experiences indicates that whiteness does not ensure class privilege . . . class identity may not develop as a separate identity among [some] members of marginalized racial groups" (p. 811) whose experiences of class oppression are perceived to be a result of their race/ethnicity (see also Hurtado et al., 1994). In her study of working-class women in academia, Jones also found that class identity becomes salient and distinct from race/ethnic identity for persons of color when they are immersed in same-race/-ethnic but cross-class contexts (e.g., an elite Black university). Thus, the negotiation of a class identity may lead to both similarities and differences in the class identity management strategies (CIMS) that upwardly mobile emerging adults from different ethnic and gender positions draw upon to negotiate their understanding of class.

Research on poor and working-class adolescents and adults has highlighted ethnic and gender similarities and differences in how class is experienced and negotiated. Upwardly mobile adolescents and adults understand the importance of education as a means to improve their class status and also recognize that part of this education is simulating the mannerisms and behaviors of their middle- and upper-class peers (Azmitia et al., 2008; Bettie, 2002; Kaufman, 2003; Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Orbe, 2008). By cueing into middle-class practices and seeking out friendships and alliances with their more privileged peers, upwardly mobile individuals learn about and appropriate into their repertoires professional class practices and skills (*class assimilation*). It appears that, regardless of their ethnicity or gender, upwardly mobile individuals recognize the opportunities that cross-class interactions afford to learn professional class mannerisms, speech, and lifestyles (i.e., their habitus; Bourdieu, 1977) and take advantage of these opportunities to achieve *individual mobility* (Granfield, 1991; Kaufman, 2003).

While it is common for upwardly mobile individuals of different ethnic backgrounds and genders to appropriate professional

class practices and beliefs, individuals' motivations for engaging in these practices may vary by ethnicity because class stereotypes are often conflated with ethnicity/race. For example, Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) found that upwardly mobile students of color at a prestigious college preparatory school provided structural explanations for class status and income disparity and were more likely to attribute negative class stereotypes to prejudice and to challenge the stereotypical assumption that to be middle class you must also be White due to their experiences with the structural barriers of racism (see also Bettie, 2002; Cooper, 2011; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fuligini, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005). In comparison, the White working-class boys at the same institution seemed to internalize the school's and society's teachings of meritocracy and articulated that personal hard work and dedication accounted for their success and, therefore, their class status. The "invisibility" of their class status via their ethnic/race identity prompted similar assimilation attempts but limited their understanding of the structural basis of class differences when compared to their non-White counterparts (see also Azmitia et al., 2008; Bettie, 2002; Fine & Weiss, 1998). Likewise, Bettie (2002) found that White upwardly mobile adolescent girls on the college prep track assimilated the professional class practices to "pass" as middle class. Their ability to "pass" as middle class, however, led the upwardly mobile White girls to hide their true identities because they were embarrassed about their parents and their upbringing. Taken together, this research suggests that the visibility of class as confounded with race/ethnicity may impact the CIMS that upwardly mobile individuals use.

In sum, the primary goal of this study was to examine social class identity development among college-going poor and working-class emerging adults by identifying (1) the identity management strategies they used to negotiate their class identities, (2) the events that trigger class identity negotiation, and (3) the associations between class identity triggers and the strategies used. We anticipated that upwardly mobile emerging adults would use both individual and collective strategies in their class identity negotiations. Given the complexity of social class and transitional nature of their class identities and the dearth of research on class identity development, rather than make specific predictions about the strategies upwardly mobile emerging adults would use, we sought to inventory these strategies and explore their association to particular triggers or social contexts. An additional goal of our research was to explore ethnic variations in the strategies and events our participants narrated.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 21 poor and working-class emerging adults (15 women; 6 men; mean age = 19.2) from a public university in a small city along the central coast of California participated. Participants were drawn from a larger longitudinal study on the role of close relationships in the transition to college. Socioeconomic background, derived from participants' self-reports of their mothers'

and fathers' educational and occupational background using Hollingshead and Redlich's (1958) index, classified 6 as poor and 15 as working class. Participants self-reported their ethnic background as follows: 8 Chicano/Latino, 6 Asian heritage, 5 European American/White, and 2 African American/Black. All of the Latino- and Asian-heritage participants were children of immigrants; two Latinos were immigrants themselves; and for two Asian-heritage participants, only one parent was an immigrant. One European American/White participant immigrated to the United States with both parents from Russia; another had a father who immigrated from Hungary. One African American participant had a father who immigrated from Nigeria.

### Measures

Participants completed the *Transition to College Interview* (TCI; AUTHORS, 2004) during the fall, winter, and spring semesters of their first year of college and either the winter or spring semester of their second (i.e., sophomore) year of college. The TCI is a semistructured interview that assesses emerging adults' thoughts about the role family, friends, and school play in their experiences in and adjustment to college. Several sections of these interviews focused on elements of personal and social identity development, including college major, career aspirations, gender, ethnicity, and social class. For the present study, we analyzed participants' open-ended responses to all questions highlighting instances where social class was discussed or salient. In their winter and sophomore interviews, participants were asked explicitly about their experiences of social class and the extent to which social class played a role in their college experiences. In their sophomore interview, they described a time, either positive or negative, when they became aware of their social class. If they did not spontaneously provide this information, participants were asked (1) Can you walk me through what happened? (2) How did you feel when this happened? (3) Did you talk to anyone about what happened and why? (4) Did this conversation affect your perception of what happened? (5) Did this event affect what you think about or how you view your own social class and social class in general and how? and (6) Did this event affect who you are as a person or how you view yourself?

### Procedure

Participants were recruited from a list of all first-year students participating in the *Educational Opportunity Programs* at the university using a random sampling procedure. Letters inviting students to participate were sent the summer prior to their entering the university; a fall data collection session was scheduled with all those who responded (50%). Additional participants were recruited through flyers posted on campus, a recruiting table in the student commons, and word of mouth. Participants were compensated for each session (US\$15 for the fall and winter quarterly interviews during the first year of college, US\$20 for the spring quarter interview, and US\$40 for the sophomore interview).

The data were gathered during the fall, winter, and spring semester of the participants' first year of college and either the winter or spring quarters of their sophomore year. Participants

were interviewed individually in a university laboratory. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for coding; interviews lasted between 45 and 90 min. Given that the sophomore year interview was the first interview that specifically asked about social class identity, we used this data point to select participants for this study; no poor and working-class participants who completed the sophomore interview were excluded. We also examined all three first-year data points for each participant.

### Qualitative Analysis

Multiple qualitative methodologies were used to analyze the social class narratives. First, we identified recurrent themes using an open-coding approach (see Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Emerging themes were further classified to capture differences regarding the events that triggered class awareness, emerging adults' emotional responses to these events, and whether and how the event affected their conceptions of class and their personal and class identities.

*CIMS*. To develop a focused coding scheme for this study, four researchers, two are the authors of this article, independently read through participants' social class narratives and other sections of the interview pertaining to social class to identify the identity management strategies, note any variations from the original conceptualizations of these strategies in the literature, and identify additional themes not originally proposed by but consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of social identity theory. This process allowed us to tailor the categories to the particularities of our sample and to achieve saturation. Once the coding scheme was finalized, the researchers independently reviewed each transcript again and coded it for the CIMS that were identified: *class mobility*, *class assimilation*, *hiding class status*, *distancing from low-class status*, *avoiding class categorization*, *reevaluating and reformulating class conceptions*, and *individual action* (see Table 1 for strategy definitions). Interrater reliability was excellent ( $\kappa = .95$ ).

*Class Identity Triggers*. The events that prompted emerging adults' discussion of class and their emotional responses to these events were noted by each researcher independently and agreed upon during a group discussion. Given the small sample size and nature of the data under consideration, this method was the most effective plan of analysis. This analysis technique followed a version of the *Listening Guide* method for reviewing and interpreting open-ended data (Taylor, Sullivan, & Gilligan, 1996). The four researchers, an European American doctoral student, at the time of data coding, and a Latina professor (the two authors of this article) and two European American undergraduate students, formed the *interpretive community* that conducted the iterative process of individual analysis and group consensus required of this analysis method.

### Results

Our coding of narratives revealed the identity management strategies that upwardly mobile poor and working-class emerging

**Table 1.** Frequencies, Percentages, and Descriptions of the Class Identity Management Strategies Employed by Upwardly Mobile Emerging Adults ( $n = 21$ ).

Strategy	Description	Frequency (Percentage)
<b>Dissociation strategies</b>		
Class mobility	Expressed motivation to change class status (e.g., completing degree so that one can obtain a "better" job to support their family)	$n = 19$ (90.5)
Class assimilation	Engaged or expressed a desire to engage in behaviors considered to be middle class (e.g., perceive self to dress or "carry" oneself like someone from the middle class)	$n = 14$ (66.7)
Hiding class status	Engaged in behaviors or expressed desire to hide one's class background (e.g., not telling others about class status due to fear of being judged)	$n = 4$ (19.0)
Cognitive distance from lower-class status	Considered oneself to be in a higher status in-group than others in their own class (e.g., more motivated to attend college than others in their class) or positioned oneself above being poor (e.g., "I'm not poor or anything")	$n = 11$ (52.4)
Avoiding class categorization	Denied or ignored class differences (e.g., we're all equal) or ascribed to achievement ideology (e.g., all can achieve regardless of class background)	$n = 15$ (71.4)
<b>Resistance strategies</b>		
Reevaluating and reformulating class conceptions	Resisted class stereotypes by acknowledging a positive characteristic of their own class (e.g., working harder, more frugal than middle-class peers), negative characteristic of higher class status (e.g., professional class lacks class consciousness), or structural attributions for class status (e.g., educational inequality; professional class born into class status)	$n = 10$ (47.6)
Individual action	Taking personal action to bring about awareness of one's own experience with class (e.g., talking to a middle-class peer about financial struggles)	$n = 6$ (28.6)

Note. Frequencies listed are the number of participants who used each strategy rather than the total number of times the strategy was used.

adults used to navigate and interpret these events in ways that protect their self-esteem and motivate them to persist in college. We summarize our findings below, incorporating examples from the emerging adults' narratives to illustrate the salient themes, identity management strategies, and class identity meaning-making processes.

## CIMS

Throughout their narratives, upwardly mobile emerging adults grappled with their conceptions of social class and the meaning it held for their own sense of self. To make sense of their class-related experiences, participants employed one or more CIMS. Seven strategies emerged: *class mobility*, *class assimilation*, *hiding class status*, *distancing from low-class status*, *avoiding class categorization*, *reevaluating and reformulating class conceptions*, and *individual action*. Table 1 lists strategy definitions and the number of emerging adults who used each strategy. These strategies primarily reflected two themes, dissociation from class status and resisting class stereotypes and social structures; each theme contained individual and collective strategies. Although examining ethnic variations was limited by the small sample size, it appears that regardless of ethnic background, upwardly mobile emerging adults used similar strategies to make sense of their social class standing (see Table 2). There are a few exceptions that are noted below.

**Dissociation Strategies.** Dissociation strategies involved attempts to cognitively or behaviorally dissociate oneself from their

class of origin. These strategies included class mobility, class assimilation, hiding class status, distancing from low-class status, and avoiding class categorizations.

At some point in their narratives about their college experiences, almost all ( $n = 19$ ; 90.5%) of the upwardly mobile emerging adults expressed their aspirations to change their group membership, that is, their class status, and highlighted their efforts to attain class mobility. The desire to cross class boundaries was often integrated with assimilative practices or desires. Emerging adults used class assimilation ( $n = 14$ ; 66.7%) by imitating or expressing a desire to imitate the behaviors, values, and beliefs of their professional- and upper-class peers such as expressing an interest in attending professional school, purchasing luxury items (e.g., cameras or brand-name purses), eating at expensive restaurants, traveling to resorts or Europe during vacations, or altering their speech patterns or vocabulary. Many emerging adults viewed college as an important avenue for upward mobility and expressed a desire to enhance their current financial situation by attaining a lucrative, professional career. Their narratives included explicit statements about how grateful they were for the opportunity to attend college and how proud they were to be the first in their family to do so. They also disclosed their dreams about what a college education would allow them to do, such as buying a house for their parents in a safer part of town, helping siblings pay for college, getting a better job, attaining a professional career, and earning enough income to be able to marry and form their own family. Megan (all names have been changed), a working-class African American female, illustrated the merger of the class

**Table 2.** Frequencies and Percentages of Class Identity Management Strategies by Ethnicity.

Strategy	Ethnicity			
	African American ( <i>n</i> = 2)	Asian American ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Latino ( <i>n</i> = 8)	White ( <i>n</i> = 5)
<b>Dissociation strategies</b>				
Class mobility	1 (50)	6 (100)	8 (100)	4 (80)
Class assimilation	2 (100)	3 (50)	4 (50)	5 (100)
Hiding class status	2 (100)	0	0	2 (40)
Cognitive distance from lower-class status	0	2 (33.3)	5 (62.5)	4 (80)
Avoiding class categorization	1 (50)	4 (66.7)	7 (87.5)	3 (60)
<b>Resistance strategies</b>				
Reevaluating and reformulating class conceptions	1 (50)	1 (16.7)	5 (62.5)	3 (60)
Individual action	0	3 (50)	3 (37.5)	0
<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	3.50 (.71)	3.17 (1.60)	4.00 (1.07)	4.40 (1.52)

Note. Frequencies listed are the number of participants who used each strategy rather than the total number of times the strategy was used. Means and standard deviations reflect the average number of strategies used per individual.

mobility and assimilation strategies in a discussion about her career aspirations stating,

I thought about going to grad school and getting a degree in law or I thought about doing marketing or advertising . . . Something that makes a lot of money though because I really wanna be well off. I wanna save up money for my children to go to college because my mother didn't save any because she was a single parent. She didn't save any money for us to go to college . . . And, I also wanted to buy my mom a house.

In some instances, emerging adults of color linked class mobility explicitly to their race as Rosa, a working-class Latina, demonstrates, "I'm a proud Mexican. I'm a minority, but I'm doing this for myself, and for other Mexicans too."

A few emerging adults attempted to *hide*, or conceal *their class status* (*n* = 4; 19.0%). At times, emerging adults assimilated professional class practices to conceal their class status. For example, Sheila, a poor African American female, stated that she devoted much time to finding affordable, trendy clothes "to make it seem like she has money" to fit in at college. However, emerging adults also hid their class status because they feared the alienation and rejection from their professional class peers and the stigma associated with being poor or working class. Kelly, a European American working-class female, exemplified the fear of being stigmatized during a cross-class peer interaction:

Most of my friends' parents are lawyers and psychologists and a friend of mine brought pictures of her house . . . she lives in this beautiful amazing house. She lives on the top of a hill overlooking [name of city], and she was like 'yeah, that's my house', and it just made me realize we're from such different backgrounds . . . I felt pretty crappy 'cuz I felt like they don't understand me because they think that everybody lives that way, that everybody's dad is a lawyer and everybody comes from a really privileged background . . . [I didn't talk to them about my background] because I didn't want to be judged by what my parents do.

All of the African American (*n* = 2; 100%) and European American (*n* = 5; 100%) emerging adults used assimilation strategies compared to 50% of the Asian (*n* = 3) and Latino (*n* = 4) heritage emerging adults. African American (*n* = 2; 100%) and European American (*n* = 2; 40%) emerging adults were also the only ethnic groups to report hiding their class status, with the European Americans expressing an explicit desire to avoid class prejudice.

*Distance from lower class status* allowed upwardly mobile emerging adults (*n* = 11; 54.4%) to psychologically disengage from their class status by distancing themselves from their class status or the concept of being poor (e.g., "I'm not poor") or by comparing themselves to a subgroup of persons from their own class who are perceived to be lower in status (e.g., "I have more drive than other than other people from my home town"). Julie, an Asian-heritage working-class female, narrated an argument she had with a housemate over his lack of concern for her financial situation but distanced herself from "others" who are "poor" when she stated,

I think it was the first time that actually opened my eyes to the social class I was in. I mean *I don't want to say I'm poor* or anything like that . . . this was the first time I realized how little amount of money I actually [have].

Upwardly mobile emerging adults also distanced themselves psychologically from their class status by denying that class differences are important or that they exist, *avoid class categorization* (*n* = 15; 71.4%). These emerging adults either denied or ignored class differences (e.g., "we're all equal; class doesn't matter"), expressed the belief that individuals should be judged based on personal attributes (e.g., personality characteristics rather than social class is what matters), or ascribed to the achievement ideology (e.g., all can achieve regardless of class background). Although Maria, a working-class Latina-heritage female, was unable to recall an event where social class was salient, she declared that "social class isn't that noticeable



here . . . everyone kind of like *molds into that normal college student* . . . we all got here on our own merits, we're all good students, so it *doesn't really matter where you come from*."

**Resistance Strategies.** Resistance strategies involved cognitive and behavioral attempts to counter both societal stereotypes and the maintenance of the status quo (cf., Langhout, 2005). Upwardly mobile emerging adults resisted class stereotypes and structural hierarchies by using social creativity strategies that were both collective and individual in nature. Resistance strategies included *reevaluate and reformulate class conceptions* and individual action.

Emerging adults *reevaluated and reformulated class conceptions* ( $n = 10$ ; 47.6%) by attributing a positive characteristic to their own class (e.g., work hard, frugal, good time managers, thrifty), attributing a devaluing characteristic to persons from higher class status (e.g., lazy, wasteful, superficial, materialistic, lack class consciousness), or identifying structural attributions for class status (e.g., educational inequality; professional class born into class status). While trying to negotiate their own class status with society's normalization of the professional class as the "ideal," these upwardly mobile emerging adults were beginning to question the value and definition of success in Western society and counter the stereotype that class status is based solely on individualistic attributions (e.g., poor people are lazy or lack education). Sara, a European American working-class female, illustrated this point during her discussion of a dinner party she attended at the house of a professional class friend.

I was at my friend's house . . . I went to what you would call a party but not really she just had some people over for dinner. It's weird that she had people over for dinner, for an actually sit down kind of dinner thing. And her house is just huge and she has her own room and everything and she has really nice dishes and all kinds of stuff and people were dressed up and things, and I was just sitting there saying, 'ok'. I'm definitely not used to that . . . [I felt] a little bit out of place . . . [This event affected my views of social class because] I think my priorities are different. When I really sit down and think about people who have tons of money and me who doesn't have as much, I think I just have a completely different perspective on what's important . . . it's just a big deal for them to look nice and have that kind of party and everyone come and sit down and have a really good time and have fancy food. And, for me, it would be more about the quality of the conversation that we had . . . than it would be to just get there and look cute and all . . . It definitely reminds me where I come from and what's important to me compared to them.

Most of the emerging adults' reevaluations were limited to social class; however, on two occasions when the situation or the emerging adult made race explicitly salient, these reevaluations confounded both class and race (see Ana's interview excerpt below).

Other upwardly mobile emerging adults attempted to bring awareness to or address their own experience of class inequality and discrimination by engaging in individual action ( $n = 6$ ;

28.6%). They did so by talking to their professional class peers about their experiences of being poor or working class in college or by directly addressing their peers' class or race discriminatory behaviors. Ana, a Mexican American working-class female, expressed her frustration and anger with her White, professional class peer's inability to separate class from race, which she perceived to be the basis of her peers' prejudicial behaviors.

We were taking a road trip, and we were talking about financial aid. My friend, she had gotten money back, and she got a digital camera. Someone in the car got mad because she didn't get financial aid, and she was like 'that's not fair you're spending my parents' tax money on your digital camera' . . . that really made us mad because she doesn't even know what a financial aid package is . . . And I said, 'if you didn't know when you get financial aid, you get loans so you're paying' . . . And, she didn't even know that the refund check she [her friend] got back was a loan that she had to get. And my friend was like, 'well if you didn't know I went six thousand dollars in debt this year so this is actually my loan money' [that is buying the camera]. And, the girl was like, 'oh'. She's always saying how her parents are always paying for college and all this stuff. You realize she thinks she's rich. So that made me mad . . . I got really angry. And, I think everyone else in the car got really mad. Even the other two girls whose parents were paying [for college] too got angry at her. They were like, 'why are you even saying that, because everyone's parents work here too'. So, I was really mad, and I voiced my opinion too . . . [This experience affected my thoughts about social class] because most of us were Latinas that had financial aid and she was white . . . Right away if they think you're a Latina, they think you're poor. So, I think that's what angered me the most . . . not how I view myself, but I guess how other people might view me because of however much your parents make.

Ana challenged the stereotype that class is confounded with race and in doing so used both resistance strategies to take an individual action to bring about an awareness of class and race prejudice and increase her peers' understanding of her own experience being working class (Azmitia et al., 2008; Bettie, 2003; Lott & Bullock, 2007). Only Asian- ( $n = 3$ ; 50%) and Latino-heritage ( $n = 3$ ; 38%) emerging adults used this strategy.

### Class Awareness Triggers

Evidence of emerging adults' class identity negotiation was interspersed throughout their interviews. We drew this conclusion from their responses to questions specifically asking them about their awareness of social class and the role it had played in their college experiences and the spontaneous disclosures of their class identity negotiations throughout the interview. Across ethnic groups, we found three common themes in the stories and events associated with their social class identities: noncomparative class-related personal experiences, cross-class interactions, and same-class interactions; instances where participants did not narrate an event in their class discussions

**Table 3.** Frequencies and Percentages of Class Identity Management Strategies by Event Type.

Strategy	Event Type			
	Noncomparative Class-Related Personal Experience ( <i>n</i> = 24)	Cross-Class Interaction ( <i>n</i> = 18)	Same-Class Interaction ( <i>n</i> = 8)	No Event ( <i>n</i> = 7)
Dissociation strategies				
Class mobility	20 (83.3)	5 (27.8)	2 (25.0)	1 (14.2)
Class assimilation	13 (54.2)	3 (16.7)	0	0
Hiding class status	0	4 (22.2)	0	0
Cognitive distance from lower-class status	3 (12.5)	3 (16.7)	7 (87.5)	0
Avoiding class categorization	5 (20.8)	5 (27.8)	1 (12.5)	7 (100)
Resistance strategies				
Reevaluating and reformulating class conceptions	0	13 (72.2)	0	0
Individual action	1 (4.2)	5 (27.8)	0	0
<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	1.74 (0.61)	2.06 (1.16)	1.25 (0.46)	1.14 (0.38)

Note. Frequencies for each event narrated are reported. The percentage within event type is listed in parentheses. Means and standard deviations reflect the average number of strategies used per event narrated.

**Table 4.** Frequencies and Percentages of Class Identity Management Strategies by Event Type Across Ethnicity.

Strategy	Ethnicity			
	African American ( <i>n</i> = 2)	Asian American ( <i>n</i> = 6)	Latino ( <i>n</i> = 8)	White ( <i>n</i> = 5)
Noncomparative class-related personal experience ( <i>n</i> = 24)	2	7	10	5
Class mobility	2 (100)	6 (85.7)	8 (80)	4 (80)
Class assimilation	1 (50)	3 (42.8)	4 (40)	5 (100)
Cognitive distance from lower-class status	—	1 (14.2)	1 (12.5)	1 (20)
Avoiding class categorization	—	2 (28.6)	2 (20)	1 (20)
Individual action	—	—	1 (12.5)	—
Cross-class interaction ( <i>n</i> = 18)	3	3	8	4
Class mobility	1 (33.3)	1 (33.3)	2 (25)	1 (25)
Class assimilation	1 (33.3)	1 (33.3)	—	1 (25)
Hiding class status	2 (66.7)	—	—	2 (50)
Cognitive distance from lower-class status	—	2 (67%)	1 (12.5)	—
Avoiding class categorization	—	—	4 (50)	1 (25)
Reevaluating and reformulating class conceptions	1 (33.3)	1 (33.3)	7 (87.5)	4 (100)
Individual action	—	3 (100)	2 (25)	—
Same-class interaction ( <i>n</i> = 8)	0	1	4	3
Class mobility	—	—	1 (25%)	1 (33.3)
Cognitive distance from lower-class status	—	—	4 (100)	3 (100)
Avoiding class categorization	—	1 (100)	—	—
No event ( <i>n</i> = 7)	1	2	3	1
Class mobility	—	—	1 (33.3)	—
Avoiding class categorization	1 (100)	2 (100)	3 (100)	1 (100)

Note. Frequencies reflect the total number of times the event type was narrated and whether a strategy was used during that narration. Percentages are in parentheses.

were classified as *no event*. A few ethnic variations did emerge during the analyses, but because of the small sample size, they should be interpreted with caution. Participants narrated between two and four stories or events related to social class (mean [*M*] = 2.71; standard deviation [*SD*] = 0.72). Each event type was associated with a different aggregate of CIMS. Table 3 lists the frequencies of each event and CIMS by event type, while Table 4 provides a breakdown by ethnicity.

**Noncomparative Personal Class-Related Experiences.** Most emerging adults discussed *noncomparative personal*, often family, *experiences* related to social class during which they did not make explicit comparisons to other groups (*n* = 24; 42.5%). The majority of these personal experiences involved the struggles and hardships their families faced because of their social class standing, including the lack of educational opportunities due to economic constraints. Many mentioned the pride they felt being the first in their family to attend college and the pressure and anxiety

associated with the responsibility to elevate their family's social class standing and act as role models for younger family members or younger students from their schools or communities. Emerging adults of color often connected these sentiments to their ethnic background. They also disclosed the anxiety associated with other challenges, such as a parent losing a job or becoming ill, paying the bills and still having some money left over for food each month, or feeling unprepared for the expectations of college academics. Two of our participants were unable to pay their rent for several months and stayed with a variety of friends, which added to their anxiety and feeling that going to college, and especially a prestigious state university, may have been a mistake. These personal experiences were often the primary motivating factor for striving for upwardly mobility and attaining a college degree. With a few exceptions, class mobility ( $n = 20$ ; 83.3%) and class assimilation ( $n = 13$ ; 54.2%) were the primary strategies used to negotiate these experiences. A few participants also used distance from lower class status ( $n = 3$ ; 12.5%), avoid class categorization ( $n = 5$ ; 20.8%), and individual action ( $n = 1$ ; 4.2%). For example, Lupita, a poor Latina, discussed the conversation she had with her mom when she was accepted into university:

I live with my mom only. And she never went to a university or anything like that so it was like what can I [her mom] tell you . . . Just if you do decide to go just take care and don't forget what I taught you . . . [this conversation was important] because it made me want her to feel proud and you know she's helped me my whole life and if going to college will help me and on the way help her too then I guess I'll go to college. And you know I want to be something I want to do something, I want to make, even if it's a minor difference, but I want to make a difference in the world.

**Cross-Class Interactions.** *Cross-class interactions* during which upwardly mobile emerging adults made upward social comparisons to their professional class peers ( $n = 18$ ; 31.6%) also promoted class identity negotiations and were the most common trigger of social class awareness when emerging adults were explicitly asked about social class. These events included being exposed to the living situations (e.g., homes, dorm rooms) and leisure activities (e.g., shopping, traveling, or dining out) of their professional class friends. A subset of these narratives from emerging adults of color included explicit experiences of class and race discrimination ( $n = 4$ ; 22.2%). Through these peer interactions, upwardly mobile emerging adults also recognized disparities between themselves and their professional class peers due to economic inequalities, including access to material goods and leisure activities, educational preparation and opportunities, and availability of leisure time to "do fun things in college." The participants also noted psychological (i.e., value) differences that stemmed from economic inequalities such as their own motivation to engage in time and money management or the lack of importance they placed on consumerism and status.

Emerging adults' discussions of cross-class interactions prompted a variety of dissociation and resistance strategies ( $M = 2.06$ ;  $SD = 1.16$ ). The most common strategy was the social creativity

strategy, reevaluate and reformulate class conceptions ( $n = 13$ ; 72.2%). Emerging adults also used class mobility ( $n = 4$ ; 22.2%), class assimilation ( $n = 3$ ; 16.7%), hiding class status ( $n = 4$ ; 22.2%), cognitive distance from lower class status ( $n = 3$ ; 16.7%), avoid class categorization ( $n = 5$ ; 27.8%), and individual action ( $n = 5$ ; 27.8%). Claudia, a poor Latina-heritage female, used dissociation and resistance strategies as she discussed the advantages of her professional class peers and her ambivalent feelings regarding these advantages:

[Social class has not really played a role in my college experiences] because I'm here so I got by somehow and the classes I take, the friends I meet, or any experiences I have here have nothing to do with how much my parents make or how much they contribute to my schooling . . . A couple of my friends are really rich . . . their parents pay for their entire schooling and stuff and it's like well my parents are struggling . . . they were talking about their home and there's five extra rooms just sitting there. And, it's like me you know, there's five rooms for seven people you know it's like damn . . . But, I don't think income makes a person, so it's never really been an issue . . . [How do these experience make you feel?] . . . it just sucks because . . . like one of my friends bought this huge screen TV . . . with his parents' money and buys everything, you know, goes anywhere. And he's rarely ever done homework and stuff and yet there are those people that are barely here, you know, struggling to be in college and they're at the library everyday . . . those people [professional class peers] are taking advantage of what's just laid out for them and so it's hard to see that . . . I'll talk about it with them. I'll be like damn you know why don't you do your work because you can you know . . . They're like well if they don't make it big or make it through school they can always go back home where they still have everything . . . when I go home I don't have anything . . . but if I stay in college then I'll finally have something. They don't get that sometimes . . . sometimes I feel like I am taking it for granted that I am here and I shouldn't be because it's not like it was so easy for me to come . . . It's hits me like I need to get on top of my school work because if I'm not then what's the point of wasting my parents money or taking out all these loans.

**Same-Class Interactions.** In contrast, some upwardly mobile emerging adults narrated experiences with same-class family and peers ( $n = 8$ ; 14.0%) during which they made downward social comparisons to other poor and working-class people. Their discussions focused on the perceived negative characteristics or situations of other poor and working-class individuals. At times, they acknowledged and expressed gratitude for their own privilege (e.g., ability to attend college; having material items, being motivated) while highlighting the disadvantage of others (e.g., others lack of family support to attend college; others having to work two full-time jobs to pay for tuition and housing; being lazy). Emerging adults of color were more likely to link these experiences to the ethnic and class backgrounds of the individuals they compared themselves to whereas European American emerging adults focused solely on class background. Fewer strategies were used to negotiate same-class interactions ( $M = 1.25$ ;  $SD = 0.46$ ), which prompted primarily dissociation strategies including cognitive

distance from low class status ( $n = 7$ ; 87.5%), class mobility ( $n = 2$ ; 25.0%), and avoid class categorization ( $n = 1$ ; 12.5%). Consistent with social identity theory, downward social comparisons produced positive emotional responses possibly aimed at protecting or increasing self-esteem (Crocker et al., 1998). William, a working-class Asian-heritage male, was discussing peers from his home community when he stated:

I actually lived smack dab in the middle of the ghetto. But, the weird thing about it was I never hung out there. I guess I knew better. I figured if I was ever going to die it would be either in a car accident or in the ghetto. So I always ended up hanging out in nicer areas. Sorta like the newer communities . . . a lot of the reason why I never hung out there was like the people my age either left already and like graduated or they were all really heavy into drugs. That wasn't really my thing.

**No Event.** When explicitly asked about social class, some emerging adults could not recall a specific event although they discussed experiences related to social class in other parts of their interviews ( $n = 7$ ; 12.3%). Their narratives denied the role of class in their college experiences and highlighted beliefs of meritocracy, equal opportunity, and classlessness. All of these participants used avoid class categorization to negotiate these experiences; one participant also used class mobility ( $n = 1$ ; 14.3%). Maria, a working-class Latina explained:

I don't see social class as a divider between people. At [college] it doesn't really matter. It's not what's talked about . . . I just don't feel like it's very important in my college. All my friends are from different social classes, and it's noticeable, but it just doesn't matter.

## Discussion

Our study bridged theory and research on identity development from developmental and social psychology, sociology, education, and anthropology to examine class identity negotiation among upwardly mobile poor and working-class emerging adults. Consistent with developmental theories of personal and social identity development, salient class-related experiences allowed emerging adults to explore their thoughts about social class and its relationship to their personal identities (Azmitia et al., 2008; Erikson, 1968; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). In their narratives, upwardly mobile emerging adults both dissociated from their status and resisted class stereotypes and social structures. Importantly, their strategies varied based on their particular class-related experience, underscoring the importance of social context for triggering awareness of and negotiation of social class identities. That many of their narratives about class awareness involved interactions with same or different class peers underscores the importance of peers in emerging adults' identity negotiations.

## CIMS

When their class membership was made salient, upwardly mobile emerging adults employed one or more CIMS to explore the

meaning that their social class had for their class and personal identities. Through this exploration, they created meaning not only about their class of origin but also for the class they aspired to attain, that is, professional class. In particular, CIMS allowed emerging adults to reduce the tension created by the felt stigma associated with their class standing, maintain a positive sense of self, and enabled them to resolve, at least momentarily, their class identity crisis (Erikson, 1968; Pagliaro et al., 2012). They integrated their dual class identities through dissociation and resistance processes.

**Dissociation Strategies.** Consistent with prior research on individual identity management strategies, upwardly mobile emerging adults engaged in behavioral and psychological dissociation from their class of origin (Pagliaro et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Almost all of our participants expressed a desire for class mobility. This finding is consistent with prior research that has shown that individual mobility (i.e., becoming a member of a higher status group) remains the focal individual strategy when group boundaries are perceived to be permeable (Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999; Roberts et al., 2008; Tajfel, 1978). In addition, class mobility, class assimilation, and hiding class status are consistent with the strategies found in prior research on upwardly mobile students (Bullock & Limbert, 2003; Granfield, 1991; Orbe, 2008). Their dreams to become successful and achieve financial independence may motivate these emerging adults to strive for class mobility and engage in the professional class practices that will help them achieve their goals. Their belief in the American Dream and their adherence to the achievement ideology (i.e., "if I work hard, I will succeed") may also explain their desire to dissociate themselves from the perceived status and practices of their class of origin. Their attempt to assimilate professional class practices and conceal their class status to "pass" as middle class suggests that college-going emerging adults may have internalized the negative stereotypes associated with their class status (Bettie, 2003).

The internalization of negative class stereotypes was also evident in emerging adults' attempts to psychologically distance themselves from their class status by using the strategies, distance from lower class status and avoiding class categorization. Some upwardly mobile emerging adults distanced themselves from their lower class status by making downward social comparisons to others in their social class who were perceived to be at a lower status level than themselves (see also Bullock & Limbert, 2003). This use of the distance from lower class status strategy maps onto the identity management strategy of subordinate recategorization (Tajfel, 1978), which involves placing oneself in a higher status group than others in one's class. However, other emerging adults distanced themselves from the idea of being poor rather than from others in their class, a finding that is consistent with Lott's (2002) concept of cognitive distancing from the poor. Making downward social comparisons such as these can be a self-protective strategy that alleviates the negative consequences that upward comparisons can have for self-esteem (Crocker et al., 1998). Such comparisons also suggest an internalization of class stereotypes in that other poor and working-class individuals who do not engage in

professional class practices are viewed as being lower in status than poor and working-class individuals who engage in such practices (Bullock & Limbert, 2003; Lott, 2002).

Upwardly mobile emerging adults also attempted to avoid being categorized by their social class status. Similar to the concept of *superordinate recategorizations* (Tajfel, 1978), the strategy *avoid class categorizations* allowed emerging adults to view their own group (poor or working class) and the high-status group (middle and upper class) as being part of a larger social category where all group members have equal status (e.g., “we’re all ‘good’ students”). These emerging adults often viewed college as an equalizer that leveled the playing field between the classes and indicated a desire to be judged based on their individual abilities and merit. While avoiding class categorization may allow emerging adults to view all classes as equal and maintain their motivation to achieve class mobility, this strategy may also inadvertently perpetuate the myth of meritocracy by not acknowledging the structural constraints that limit the opportunities that other poor and working-class persons have to participate in the professional class world (cf., Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003).

Although distance from low-class status and avoiding class categorizations can be viewed as collective strategies because they attempt to enhance the emerging adults’ in-group status (Blanz et al., 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the goal of these strategies is to disengage psychologically from one’s social class identity and the negative characteristics ascribed to that identity rather than discredit stereotypes. Rendering one’s in-group as different from others in her class or one’s social identity as insignificant or invisible suggests dissociation processes. Rather than grouping strategies only on individual or collective continuum, we propose that incorporating a dissociation and resistance framework into theory and research on identity management strategies would enhance our understanding of college-going adults’ social class identity development

**Resistance Strategies.** Upwardly mobile emerging adults cognitively and behaviorally resisted class stereotypes on individual and collective levels. Those who reevaluated and reformulated class conceptions countered existing societal conceptions of social class by creating a new class comparison dimensions and reassigning middle-class attributes to themselves and others from their class of origin. This strategy integrates Tajfel’s (1978) social creativity strategies, *reevaluation of comparison dimension* and new comparison dimension. Because our participants integrated these two types of identity management strategies in their narratives, it was difficult to ascertain whether an attribute was a preexisting or new comparison dimension for them. For example, in response to her discussion about the economic advantages of her upper-middle-class peers, one emerging adult said that individuals from her class value family. While this statement appears to embody a new comparison dimension, stereotypes about the lack of family values of low-income individuals that pervade the media make this assumption problematic (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001; Holtzman, 2000).

Moreover, while some emerging adults articulated a comparison based on a single attribute (e.g., professional class spends frivolously whereas poor and working class are more thrifty), others qualified positive and devaluing comparisons on two separate attributes (e.g., the professional class is materialistic but the working-class values family). Adding to this complexity, emerging adults often responded to a comparison dimension (e.g., economic wealth) by changing the value of another stigmatizing attribute (e.g., work ethic). That is, when describing the economic advantages of their higher class peers, they not only changed the comparison dimension, but also reformulated societal conceptions of class by claiming that poor and working-class persons had or scored higher than middle- and upper-class persons on characteristics typically associated with being middle class (e.g., “poor persons work harder than their middle class peers”). While upwardly mobile emerging adults may have internalized class stereotypes as evidenced by their use of dissociation strategies, the challenges that they and their families have faced allow them to question and ultimately resist these same societal conceptions.

In addition to their cognitive resistance, upwardly mobile emerging adults engaged in individual actions to bring about class awareness. Undertaking individual actions may be conceptualized as an individual approach, or perhaps a preliminary step, toward engaging in collective action to bring about equality in resources and opportunities for the poor and working class. The upwardly mobile emerging adults in the current study did not discuss engagement in collective action (Tajfel, 1986); a finding that is consistent with prior research that suggests that group consciousness regarding stigmatized identities is often low (Gurin & Townsend, 1986). Granfield (1991), however, found that many of the working-class law students he interviewed anticipated using their law degree for social justice pursuits in their first year of law school (see also Azmitia et al., 2008). In the present study, the upwardly mobile emerging adults were in their first and second years in college and may still be in the initial stages of forming their social class identities, choosing their major and, therefore, not yet be ready to engage in collective action strategies. Alternatively, our participants may not have discussed their collective action behaviors or beliefs because they were not asked to do so.

### *Associations Between Event Context and CIMS*

Because we interviewed them 4 times over the course of their first 2 years of college, we were able to assess patterns in emerging adults’ social class identity negotiation strategies and assess whether some triggers or social contexts were more likely to elicit particular strategies. We found that experiences that involved same- or lower-class individuals were more likely to activate dissociation strategies, whereas cross-class interactions were more likely to elicit resistance strategies. The juxtaposition of dissociation and resistance strategies reveals the tension and ambivalence present in the navigation of their upwardly mobile identities (Langhout, 2005; Orbe, 2008; Pagliaro et al., 2012; Roberts et al., 2008). It also suggests that class identity is organic and situation dependent; that is, a particular situation may

activate known class stereotypes and the accessibility of those stereotypes may prompt the use of distinct identity management strategies (Langhout, 2005; Roberts et al., 2008). Thus, both dissociation and resistance strategies may be adaptive and serve competing or complementary needs (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Roberts et al., 2008). Dissociation strategies reduce the salience of their devalued identity and enable emerging adults to avoid, as individuals, the stereotypes associated with being poor or working class (Mummendey et al., 1999; Roberts et al., 2008). In comparison, resistance strategies allowed emerging adults to identify with their poor and working-class identities maintaining an authentic sense of self and protecting their self-esteem by providing a sense of pride in their class status that challenges prevailing stereotypes (Langhout, 2005; Roberts et al., 2008).

Emerging adults' use of multiple strategies may also stem from their multiple belief systems. On one hand, emerging adults may adhere to the tenets of the achievement ideology, which views a person's relative deprivation as legitimate and changeable and would encourage the use of dissociation strategies (Folger, 1987; Niens & Cairns, 2003; Runciman, 1966). On the other hand, emerging adults may also perceive the financial and leisure opportunities afforded their professional peers in college to be illegitimate (i.e., unfair or inherited privilege) and their own situation to be stable, at least while in college. Research has shown that the perception of one's relative deprivation as illegitimate and stable is more likely to increase both resentment toward the higher status group and the use of collective strategies (Folger, 1987).

The patterns that obtained also reflect the competing motivations inherent in emerging adults' negotiation of their dual class identities. That is, the upwardly mobile emerging adults needed to believe that upward mobility was possible while making sense of the boundaries to class mobility that still existed and were present in their college experiences (Orbe, 2008; Pagliaro et al., 2012). The prevalence of resistance strategies may reflect a need to maintain interpersonal relationships with family and friends from their class of origin resulting in psychological and behavioral disengagement from their aspiring middle-class identities to maintain a connection to these significant others (Brewer, 1991; Cooper, 2011; Gándara, 1995; Orbe, 2008). Students of color were especially likely to mention the tensions between being upwardly mobile and retaining ties to their families and home community peers, which is consistent with prior work highlighting the importance of family in these communities, especially for immigrants or children of immigrants (Cooper, 2011; Fuligini et al., 2005). Taken together, our findings support and extend prior work on the factors that contribute to the use of specific identity management strategies by highlighting the role that contexts, in this case, class awareness triggers, play in the selection of identity management strategies (Roberts et al., 2008). Moreover, these findings support the notion that class identity is malleable; that is, emerging adults' adapt their class identity to the context and the salience and centrality of their multiple identities (cf. Azmitia et al., 2008; Bettie, 2002; Deaux & Perkins, 2001; Orbe, 2008; Roberts et al., 2008).

### *Intersection of Multiple Social Identities*

Class stereotypes that conflate class with race may influence not only the experiences that upwardly mobile emerging adults encounter but also their choice of strategies. Given our small sample size, we will now cautiously speculate about the few ethnic trends that emerged in our study. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there were more similarities across ethnic groups in the class-related events that upwardly mobile emerging adults narrated and strategies they engaged in to make sense of and cope with these events.

Although emerging adults from all ethnic backgrounds experienced the stigma associated with their class status, often describing similar personal, same-class, and cross-class experiences, emerging adults of color were more likely than their European American counterparts to integrate their ethnic and class identities in their narratives of the events and strategies they used and to narrate explicitly either class-based or class-/race-based prejudice. Despite this trend, social class was sometimes more salient than ethnicity for some emerging adults of color, while the reasons some European American emerging adults gave for hiding their class (i.e., to avoid class judgment) may suggest that they have experienced class prejudice (for research in which European American working class or poor emerging adults explicitly discuss prejudice see Jones, 2003; Ostrove, 2003). Consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the intersection of their multiple social identities and the situational context may foreground one or more of the emerging adults' social identities triggering the use of different CIMS as well as different manifestations of the same strategies (Azmitia et al., 2008; Deaux & Perkins, 2001; Pagliaro et al., 2012). For example, eating at a fancy restaurant or dressing in trendy name-brand clothes foreground class in the assimilation process, whereas attaining a college degree to serve as a role model and source of pride for ones' family and community suggests an integrated class and ethnic foreground (see also Hurtado et al., 1994).

Moreover, the situational context may also help explain the finding that both African American and European American emerging adults reported hiding their class status. While prior research has found that class/race stereotypes that conflate class with race may make it easier for European American emerging adults to assimilate and hide their class status and hinder this process in emerging adults of color, these finding varied depending on socioeconomic structure of institutions or classrooms that were sampled (Bettie, 2002; Granfield, 1991; Jones, 2003; Kuriloff & Reichert, 2003). It is possible that the African American students in our study felt a greater need and enhanced opportunity to hide their class status and assimilate, given that the majority of the students at the university were from middle-class and upper middle-class standing. Given that the Latino- and Asian-heritage emerging adults were from immigrant families, strong ties to their ethnic heritage along with class/race stereotypes may have enhanced their identification with their ethnic identity and lessened their need or ability to conceal their class identity (Bettie, 2002; Cooper, 2011; Hurtado et al., 1994).

Prior experience with discrimination and structural constraints may help explain the finding that Asian- and Latino-heritage emerging adults were the only ethnic groups to engage in individual actions. As proposed by feminist scholars, intersecting “systems of oppression” create unique social positions and lenses from which the individual understands and interacts in the world (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1994). Poor and working-class persons of color experience multiple layers of oppression—class, ethnicity, and for some gender. These multiple identities may make it more likely that upwardly mobile emerging adults of color will not only recognize the structural constraints that lead to their oppression but also take actions to effect change. The small number of African Americans in our study relative to the other ethnic groups may explain why they are also not represented in the use of this strategy. Future research should continue to unpack systematically how the integration of multiple social identities varies based on context and generational status and plays a role in the negotiation of class identities and the class identity strategies used.

### Limitations and Future Research

Although our study addressed a gap in the literature on class identity negotiation, a few limitations should be noted. First, our study focused on ethnically diverse poor and working-class emerging adults who attended a 4-year university where students were predominantly from professional class backgrounds, thus limiting the generalizability of our findings to other poor and working-class individuals. Upwardly mobile emerging adults attending colleges and universities where socioeconomic status is more evenly distributed may utilize different combinations of strategies, given variations in their exposure to professional class peers and opportunities for affiliation and support from same class peers (cf., Orbe, 2008). Fewer cross-class interactions may promote the use of more dissociation strategies and fewer resistance strategies.

It would also be important to examine how emerging adults who choose not to attend college view their social class and navigate their class identity and the stigma associated with their class status. Some of these poor and working-class emerging adults may seek alternative avenues to upward mobility, or may only seek economic mobility, while others may desire class mobility but view class boundaries as impermeable due to structural constraints (cf., Fine & Wise, 1998). Identifying these variations would yield a more nuanced understanding of the processes and content (i.e., definitions, values, and beliefs) of class identity negotiations and the factors that contribute to the use of specific CIMS.

Although the emerging adults in our study came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, our small sample size, that is disproportionately women, limits our ability to discern statistically ethnic and gender variations in their CIMS and the events they narrated. Given the power and status hierarchies that mark each gender’s position in society, gender may also play a role in how class is experienced and class identities are formed (Archer, 1992). Using a larger sample size to examine

ethnic and gender variations in class identity negotiations would allow us to assess how multiple social identities intersect and shape the negotiation of class identities. It will be equally important to explore within-group in addition to between-group similarities and differences when examining these intersections because, as seen in our study, emerging adults’ personal histories and present circumstances create variation in their CIMS.

In sum, upwardly mobile emerging adults grapple with the integration of social class into their personal and social identities to varying degrees. Emerging adults’ subjective daily experiences and interactions in cultural and interpersonal contexts inform and influence the construction, negotiation, and renegotiation of their class and self-conceptions. As upwardly mobile, college-going emerging adults encounter new people and different environments, their class and self-conceptions are negotiated and updated based on these new experiences (Azmitia et al., 2008; Cooper, 2011). Differences in geographical location, school and work settings, friendship circles, and familial values and beliefs can differentially impact the subjective experiences of upwardly mobile emerging adults (Orbe 2008; Way, Santos, Niwa, & Kim-Gervey, 2008). Future research should explore longitudinally whether and how differences in these contexts affect class identity development and how class identity becomes integrated with emerging adults’ identities or selves as they graduate college and enter the workforce. Finally, it is critical that researchers continue to give voice to the subjective experiences of less privileged persons to not only create awareness of the struggles and injustices they face but also effect change on the structural inequalities that perpetuate these social inequalities and injustices.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was funded by grants from UC-ACCORD, UC-LMRI, the Spencer Foundation and the Academic Senate of the University of California at Santa Cruz.

### References

- Adams, G. R., & Marshall, S. K. (1996). A developmental social psychology of identity: Understanding the person-in-context. *Journal of Adolescence, 19*, 429-442.
- Archer, S. L. (1992). A feminist’s approach to identity research. In G. R. Adams, T. P. Gullotta & R. Montemayor (Eds.), *Adolescent identity formation* (pp. 25-49). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Azmitia, M., McLean, K., Radmacher, K., Tonyan, H., Gills, J., & Reis, O. (2004). *The Transition to College Interview*. University of California, Santa Cruz. Unpublished survey.
- Azmitia, M., Syed, M., & Radmacher, K. (2008). On the intersection of personal and social identities: Introduction and evidence from a longitudinal study of emerging adults. In M. Azmitia, M. Syed & K. Radmacher (Eds.), *The intersections of personal and social*

- identities. *New directions in child and adolescent development* (Vol. 120, pp. 1-16). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Bettie, J. (2002). Exceptions to the rule: Upwardly mobile white and Mexican American high school girls. *Gender and Society, 16*(3), 403-422.
- Bettie, J. (2003). *Women without class: Girls, race and identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Blanz, M., Mummendey, A., Miekke, R., & Klink, S. (1998). Responding to a negative social identity: A taxonomy of identity management strategies. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 28*, 697-729.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin, 17*, 475-482.
- Bullock, H. E., & Limbert, W. M. (2003). Scaling the socioeconomic ladder: Low-income women's perceptions of class status and opportunity. *Journal of Social Issues, 59*, 693-709.
- Bullock, H. E., Wyche, K. F., & Williams, W. R. (2001). Media images of the poor. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*, 229-246.
- Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cooper, C. R. (2011). *Bridging multiple worlds: Cultures, identities, and pathways to college*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1994). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. In M. A. Fineman & R. Mykitiuk (Eds.), *The public nature of private violence: The discovery of domestic abuse* (pp. 93-118), New York, NY: Routledge.
- Crocker, J., Major, B., & Steele, C. (1998). Social stigma. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 2, pp. 504-553). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Cross, W. E., Jr., & Vandiver, B. J. (2001). Nigrescence theory and measurement: Introducing the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS). In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A., Suzuki & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (2nd ed., pp. 371-393). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Deaux, K., & Perkins, T. S. (2001). The kaleidoscopic self. In C. Sedikides & M. B. Brewer (Eds.), *Individual self, relational self, collective self* (pp. 299-313). Philadelphia, PA: Taylor & Francis.
- Dixon, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education 10 years later. In A. D. Dixon & C. K. Rousseau (Eds.), *Critical race theory in education* (pp. 31-56). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (2002). Self and social identity. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53*, 161-186.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.
- Fine, M., & Weis, L. (1998). *The unknown city: The lives of poor and working-class young adults*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Folger, R. (1987). Reformulating the preconditions of resentment: A referent cognitions model. In J. C. Master & W. P. Smith (Eds.), *Social comparison, social justice, and relative deprivation* (pp. 183-215). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the "burden of 'acting white'". *Urban Review, 18*, 176-206.
- Fulgini, A. J., Witkow, M., & Garcia, C. (2005). Ethnic identity and the academic adjustment of adolescents from Mexican, Chinese, and European backgrounds. *Developmental Psychology, 41*, 799-811.
- Gándara, P. (1995). *Over the ivy walls: The educational mobility of low-income Chicanos*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Granfield, R. (1991). Making it by faking it: Working class students in an elite academic environment. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 20*, 331-351.
- Gurin, P., & Townsend, A. (1986). Properties of gender identity and their implications for group consciousness. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 25*, 139-148.
- Hochschild, J. L. (1995). *Facing up to the American dream: Race, class, and the soul of the nation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hollingshead, A. B., & Redlich, F. C. (1958). *Social class and mental illness*. New York, NY: John Wiley.
- Holtzman, L. (2000). *Media messages: What film, television, and popular music teach us about race, class, gender, and sexual orientation*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Hurtado, A. (1996). *The color of privilege: Three blasphemies on race and feminism*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Hurtado, A., Gurin, P., & Peng, T. (1994). Social identities: A framework for studying the adaptations of immigrants and ethnics: The adaptations of Mexicans in the United States. *Social Problems, 41*, 129-151.
- Jones, S. J. (2003). Complex subjectivities: Class, ethnicity, and race in women's narratives of upward mobility. *Journal of Social Issues, 59*, 803-820.
- Kaufman, P. (2003). Learning to not labor: How working-class individuals construct middle-class identities. *The Sociological Quarterly, 44*, 481-504.
- Kuriloff, P., & Reichert, M. C. (2003). Boys of class, boys of color: Negotiating the academic and social geography of an elite independent school. *Journal of Social Issues, 59*, 751-769.
- Langhout, R. D. (2005). Acts of resistance: Student (in)visibility. *Culture & Psychology, 11*, 123-158.
- Langhout, R. D., Drake, P., & Rosselli, F. (2009). Classism in the university setting: Examining student antecedents and outcomes. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 2*, 166-181.
- Langhout, R. D., Rosselli, F., & Feinstein, J. (2007). What's class got to do with it? Assessing classism in academic settings. *Review of Higher Education, 30*, 145-184.
- Leahy, R. L. (1983). The development of the conception of social class. In R. L. Leahy (Ed.), *The child's construction of social inequality* (pp. 79-107). New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Lott, B. (2002). Cognitive and behavioral distancing from the poor. *American Psychologist, 57*, 100-110.
- Lott, B., & Bullock, H. E., (2007). *Psychology and economic injustice: Personal, professional, and political intersections*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- MacLeod, J. (1995). *Ain't no makin' it: Aspirations and attainment in a low-income neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology, 5*, 100-122.
- Mummendey, A., Kessler, T., Klink, A., & Mielke, R. (1999). Strategies to cope with negative social identity: Predictions by social



- identity theory and relative deprivation theory. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 76, 229-245.
- Niens, U., & Cairns, E. (2002). Identity management strategies in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 142, 371-380.
- Niens, U., & Cairns, E. (2003). Explaining social change and identity management strategies: New directions for future research. *Theory & Psychology*, 13, 489-509.
- Ochberg, R. L., & Comeau, W. (2001). Moving up and the problem of explaining and "unreasonable" ambition. In D. P. McAdams & R. Josselson (Eds.), *Turns in the road: Narrative studies of lives in transition* (pp. 121-149). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Orbe, M. P. (2008). Theorizing multidimensional identity negotiation: Reflections on the lived experiences of first-generation college students. In M. Azmitia, M. Syed & K. Radmacher, (Eds.), *The intersections of personal and social identities. New directions in child and adolescent development* (Vol. 120, pp. 81-95). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ostrove, J. M. (2003). Belonging and wanting: Meanings of social class background for women's constructions of their college experiences. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59, 771-784.
- Ostrove, J. M., & Long, S. M. (2007). Social class and belonging: Implications for college adjustment. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30, 363-389.
- Oyserman, D., Johnson, E., & James, L. (2011). Seeing the destination but not the path: Effects of socioeconomic disadvantage on school-focused possible self content and linked behavioral strategies. *Self & Identity*, 10, 474-492.
- Pagliaro, S., Alparone, F. R., Pacilli, M. G., & Mucchi-Faina, A. (2012). Managing identity threat: Ambivalence toward the ingroup as psychological disengagement. *Social Psychology*, 41, 41-46.
- Phinney, J. S., & Rothenthal, D. A. (1992). Ethnic identity in adolescence: Process, context, and outcome. In G. R. Adams, T. P. Gullotta & R. Montemayor, (Eds.), *Adolescent identity formation* (pp. 145-172). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Quinn, D. M. (2006). Concealable versus conspicuous stigmatized identities. In S. Levin & C. van Laar (Eds.), *Stigma and group inequality: Social psychological perspectives* (pp. 83-103). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Roberts, J. S., & Rossenwald, G. C. (2001). Ever upward and no turning back: Social mobility and identity formation among first-generation college students. In D. P. Adams, R. Josselson & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Turns in the road: Narrative studies of lives in transition*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Roberts, L. M., Settles, I. H., & Jellison, W. A. (2008). Predicting the strategic identity management of gender and race. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 8, 269-306.
- Runciman, W. G. (1966). *Relative deprivation and social justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schwartz, J. L., Donovan, J., & Guido\_DiBrito, F. (2009). Stories of social class: Self-identified Mexican male college students crack the silence. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50, 50-66.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Syed, M., & Azmitia, M. (2008). A narrative approach to ethnic identity in emerging adulthood: Bringing life to the identity status model. *Development Psychology*, 44, 1012-1027.
- Tajfel, H. (1978). *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. London, England: Academic Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago, IL: Nelson.
- Taylor, J. M., Gilligan, C., & Sullivan, A. M. (1996). Missing voices, changing meanings: Developing a voice-centered, relational method, and creating an interpretative community. In S. Wilkinson (Ed.), *Feminist social psychologies: International perspectives* (pp. 33-256). Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Way, N., Santos, C., Niwa, E. Y., & Kim-Gervey, C. (2008). To be or not to be: An exploration of ethnic identity development in context. In M. Azmitia, M. Syed & K. Radmacher (Eds.), *The intersections of personal and social identities. New directions in child and adolescent development* (Vol. 120, pp. 61-79). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

### Author Biographies

**Kimberley Radmacher**, a developmental psychologist, studies identity negotiation and relationship processes in adolescents and emerging adults. She is especially interested in class identity development and its intersection with ethnicity and gender.

**Margarita Azmitia**, a developmental psychologist, studies identity negotiation, close relationships, educational pathways, and well-being in diverse adolescents and emerging adults. She is especially interested in the intersection between ethnicity, gender, and class in identity development.