Class, Chaos, and the Construction of Community

Paul K. Piff
University of California, Berkeley

Daniel M. Stancato
Seattle, Washington

Andres G. Martinez
George Mason University

Michael W. Kraus
University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign

Dacher Keltner
University of California, Berkeley

Chaotic conditions are a prevalent and threatening feature of social life. Five studies examined whether social class underlies divergent responses to perceptions of chaos in one's social environments and outcomes. The authors hypothesized that when coping with perceptions of chaos, lower class individuals tend to prioritize community, relative to upper class individuals, who instead tend to prioritize material wealth. Consistent with these predictions, when personally confronting chaos, lower class individuals were more communally oriented (Study 1), more connected with their community (Study 2), and more likely to volunteer for a community-building project (Study 3), compared to upper class individuals. In contrast, perceptions of chaos caused upper class individuals to express greater reliance on wealth (Study 4) and prefer financial gain over membership in a close-knit community (Study 5), relative to lower class individuals. These findings suggest that social class shapes how people respond to perceptions of chaos and cope with its threatening consequences.

Keywords: social class, chaos, coping, communal relationships, material wealth

Rent by rupture and fissure, the lower class environment is perpetually plagued with crises and future uncertainty. . . . [T]he poor must devise ways to ride out or otherwise neutralize its unpredictable nature. (Harvey, 1993, p. 24)

Perceptions of chaos and randomness in the social environment predict important life outcomes. Perceptions of chaos can arise during times of economic uncertainty, political instability, family crisis, and physical decline (Evans, Gonnella, Marcynyszyn, Gen-

tile, & Salpekar, 2005; Franzini, Caughy, Nettles, & O'Campo, 2008; Pennebaker & Stone, 2004). Perceptions of chaos defy people's motivation to view the world as stable and structured, and threaten the self (see Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008; Kay, Whitson, Gaucher, & Galinsky, 2009; Lerner, 1980; Peterson, 1999). Signaling a lack of structure in the social environment, perceptions of chaos undermine the individual's ability to control, plan, and problem solve (e.g., Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Pham, Taylor, & Seeman, 2001); they are psychologically threatening and deleterious to well-being (e.g., Haidt & Rodin, 1999; Pennebaker & Stone, 2004; Taylor, Repetti, & Seeman, 1997; Thompson, Cheek, & Graham, 1988); and they motivate people to adopt strategies to manage this stress (e.g., Kay, Moscovitch, & Laurin, 2010).

The resources available to people for coping with perceptions of chaos in the social environment, and thus people's strategies for defending against perceptions of chaos, are not evenly distributed across society. We reason that people's responses to perceptions of chaos are significantly influenced by their social class—their position in a social hierarchy as shaped by their material resources (e.g., income) and corresponding subjective perceptions of rank vis-à-vis others (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011; Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012).

Endowed with fewer material resources and subordinate rank relative to others in society, empirical studies find that lower class individuals are more inclined to prioritize social relationships and attend to others' welfare (e.g., Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010). In contrast, upper class individuals, whose lives are characterized by more abundant resources and elevated rank, tend to prioritize self-reliance and value their own material well-being (e.g., Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Piff et al., 2010; Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007). Guided by these findings, we posit that lower and upper class individuals will diverge when coping with feelings of chaos. We hypothesize that lower class individuals will become more oriented to others in their immediate surroundings—their community—compared to their upper class counterparts, who we expect instead to rely on material wealth—by more strongly valuing and prioritizing it—to defend against perceptions of chaos. In pursuing this line of inquiry, we extend prior work on social class by investigating its influences on people's tendencies to differentially value and rely on social relationships versus material resources when coping with chaos and randomness in their lives.

Coping With Perceptions of Chaos

Environmental threats and stressors trigger salient coping strategies, such as fight-or-flight, tend-and-befriend, and social comparison processes (e.g., self-evaluation against others; Taylor, 2006; Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Taylor et al., 1997). Like the distress associated with personal uncertainty about one's identity and values (see McGregor & Marigold, 2003; McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001), perceptions of chaos within one's social environments represent a significant form of threat: These perceptions undermine views of the world as ordered, provoke anxiety, and jeopardize people's ability to self-regulate and cope (Kay et al., 2008, 2009; Lerner, 1980; Peterson, 1999). Feelings of chaos and randomness can lead to persistent and debilitating patterns of helplessness, motivating individuals to adopt compensatory strategies aimed to restore perceptions of order in their lives.

Perceptual strategies are one means by which individuals respond to the threat of chaos. In one well-developed literature, reductions in personal control—which render the individual more susceptible to feelings of chaos—can cause people to more strongly endorse beliefs that the external world is orderly, via more specific strategies such as supporting the government or believing in superstitions and conspiracy theories (e.g., Kay et al., 2008; Laurin, Kay, & Moscovitch, 2008; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008). Even activating thoughts related to chaos and randomness can prompt people to invoke supernatural forces to reaffirm their belief in a structured world (Kay et al., 2010). Extending this prior work, we test whether perceptions of chaos can potentiate class-specific coping strategies—a reliance on community versus wealth—among lower class individuals and upper class individuals, respectively.

Prior research justifies our claim that relying on community or wealth can serve protective functions against perceptions of chaos. A community is a group of people committed to mutual support and aid (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). It is well documented that in times of threat, turning to social support can reduce psychological

and physiological stress (Taylor, 2007; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996), help in coping with feelings of anxiety (Kirkpatrick & Navarrete, 2006), and even alleviate physical pain (Zhou & Gao, 2008). When individual means of control and self-efficacy are threatened by feelings of chaos, relying on others' support can promote feelings of order and structure, reassure the self that one's needs will be met, and facilitate coping.

For many reasons, material resources likewise can buffer people from threatening perceptions of chaos and randomness. Wealth represents a means for achieving desired goals and outcomes (Lea & Webley, 2006) and can foster a sense of individual control and mastery (Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Zhou & Gao, 2008). In this way, wealth can alleviate psychological distress and diminish physical pain in situations of threat (W. Johnson & Krueger, 2006; Zhou, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2009), by providing a compensatory form of freedom and control and alleviating self-doubt (Chang & Arkin, 2002). Thus, people may turn to material wealth to reduce psychological uncertainty, restore feelings of self-efficacy, and enhance their ability to cope when their sense of personal control has been threatened by perceptions of chaos.

These literatures suggest that social and material resources can be used to guard against perceptions of chaos, promote feelings of order and structure, and facilitate coping. Building on this research, we hypothesize that orienting to community versus material wealth are differentially salient—and preferred—coping strategies among lower and upper class individuals faced with chaotic conditions.

We base these predictions on the following reasoning. Lower class individuals have fewer material resources and reduced rank, and their lives—both objectively and in terms of subjective construal—are more vulnerable to external influences (Evans, 2004; Evans et al., 2005; Kraus et al., 2009). Given these life circumstances, we suggest that lower class individuals are more likely to rely on others in the social environment—their community—to provide coherence to their lives when faced with chaotic conditions. As discussed above, turning to others for social support is a well-documented response to environmental threat (e.g., Taylor, 2007).

In contrast, increased wealth and rank in society afford upper class individuals greater autonomy, independence, and self-reliance (W. Johnson & Krueger, 2005, 2006; Kraus et al., 2009; Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Lareau, 2003). Material wealth, therefore, heightens upper class individuals' sense of control and ability to achieve desired outcomes (Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Zhou & Gao, 2008), which are undermined by feelings of chaos. Material wealth may be a particularly salient, accessible, and preferred individual coping mechanism for members of the upper class when they are threatened by perceptions of chaos within the social environment.

Social Class, Chaos, and Relying on Community Versus Wealth

Mounting evidence justifies the assertion that lower class individuals may engage in more communal strategies—turning to relationships with others in the social environment—to cope with perceptions of chaos, relative to upper class individuals, who value self-reliance and, as a result, may instead prioritize wealth (Kraus et al., 2009, 2012; Piff et al., 2010, 2012; Snibbe & Markus, 2005;

Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2011; Stephens et al., 2007). This research argues that disparities in resources and rank lead lower class individuals to *other-focused* cognition and behavior and upper class individuals to more *self-focused* social-cognitive tendencies. In this literature, lower class individuals have been found to be more cognizant of other individuals in their surroundings and more engaged with their needs, compared to their upper class counterparts, who are more self-focused and prioritize self-interest (for a review, see Kraus et al., 2012).

There are numerous empirical demonstrations of these class-related differences in other- versus self-focus. Studies have found that whereas lower class individuals make choices that enhance their similarity to others—for instance, preferring material objects that others chose—upper class individuals choose to differentiate themselves from others (e.g., preferring unique-looking objects; Stephens et al., 2007). With respect to interpersonal behavior, lower class individuals exhibit more nonverbal signs of interest and engagement (e.g., eye contact, head nods) in interactions with strangers and are more attentive to others' emotions, compared to their upper class counterparts (Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Kraus et al., 2010, 2009). These different social tendencies are likely to underlie divergent responses to others in the social environment—one's community—among lower and upper class individuals when they are confronted by chaos in their lives (for similar lines of reasoning on how the threat of self-uncertainty can prompt more extreme expressions of personal values, see McGregor & Marigold, 2003; McGregor et al., 2001).

Class-related differences in other- versus self-focus extend to prosocial behavior and materialism. Lower class individuals orient more readily to others' needs, relative to members of the upper class. A variety of studies found that lower class individuals are more generous and altruistic than their upper class counterparts (Independent Sector, 2002; Piff et al., 2010). Upper class individuals, however, are more likely to privilege their own material welfare, for instance by cheating or lying to others for personal gain (Piff et al., 2012). These lines of research suggest that even when given access to wealth, lower class individuals prioritize their relationship with others within the social environment. By contrast, upper class individuals privilege their own material welfare, which itself is likely to facilitate self-reliance (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006)—a trait particularly valued by upper class individuals (Lareau, 2003). Given these diverging values and tendencies, we would expect lower and upper class individuals to rely to different degrees upon social relationships versus material wealth to defend against feelings of chaos.

To summarize, given the confluence of relatively reduced resources and rank, increased other-focus, and greater prioritization of others' welfare, we reason that lower class individuals should be especially likely to rely on relationships with people in the social environment—their community—to defend themselves against perceptions of chaos, relative to upper class individuals. By contrast, given the confluence of relatively increased resources and rank, increased self-focus, and greater prioritization of self-interest, we propose that upper class individuals should be especially likely to rely on—and value—wealth to cope with threats associated with perceptions of chaos, relative to lower class individuals.

The Present Research

Five studies tested whether perceptions of chaos yield class-based divergences in coping. Our first three studies examined whether, when directly confronting chaos in their lives, lower class individuals were more communally oriented (Study 1), more connected to their community (Study 2), and more likely to build community (Study 3), relative to their upper class counterparts. Study 4 investigated whether perceptions of chaos cause upper class individuals to report a greater reliance upon wealth, compared to lower class individuals. Finally, Study 5 tested whether perceptions of chaos cause upper class individuals to choose wealth over community, relative to lower class individuals. Across both correlational and experimental studies, and in university and nationwide samples, we used assessments of social class that represent the construct's two core facets: objective resources (e.g., income) and subjective social class rank (Adler et al., 2000; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). We also sought to account for factors that might confound the relation between social class and responses to chaos (e.g., ethnicity, negative valence).

Study 1: Social Class, Expectations of Future Chaos, and Communal Orientation

Study 1 sought to provide initial evidence that lower and upper class individuals diverge when confronting the potential for chaos in their own lives. Specifically, we examined whether lower class individuals are more communal—more engaged with and reliant on others in their social environment—than are their upper class counterparts when expecting chaos in their lives. Using a paradigm adapted from prior research (e.g., Back & Bourque, 1970), we assessed the degree to which participants expected their lives to be stable versus chaotic. We also assessed participants' levels of communal orientation (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987), which enabled us to test whether expectations of future chaos predicted divergent communal tendencies among lower and upper class individuals. We predicted that expectations of future chaos would moderate the effects of social class on communal orientation, such that among participants expecting future chaos (versus stability), lower class individuals would be more communally oriented than upper class individuals.

Method

Participants. Seventy-six participants (48 female) were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a website that features a diverse nationwide participant pool for online data collection (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 66 years ($M = 36.99$, $SD = 11.49$). Sixty participants categorized themselves as European American, eight characterized themselves as Native American, and 13 characterized themselves as African American, Asian American, Latino/a, or other ethnicity (one unreported). The sum of these categories exceeds 76 because some participants listed more than one ethnic category (similarly, as participants could choose more than one ethnicity across studies, the sum of categories could exceed the total number of participants). Demonstrating the diversity of social class backgrounds represented in the sample, 44% reported household incomes below the

median household income in 2009 ($49,777; United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Procedure. Participants accessed the study via a survey link. After providing consent, participants completed a measure of communal orientation before reporting their expectations of future chaos. This reduced the likelihood that the measure of future chaos biased participants in their reports of communal orientation. After reporting their demographics, participants were thanked and debriefed before finishing the study.

Measures.

Future chaos. To assess participants' expectations of chaos versus order in their lives, we asked participants to choose one of two graphs to represent their expectations of the future. This methodology was adapted from a task used in life course research in which individuals are asked to graphically represent the course of their lives (e.g., Back & Bourque, 1970; see also Settersten & Mayer, 1997). In the current measure, participants were given two graphs depicting different economic trajectories, with time represented on the horizontal axis and economic well-being on the vertical axis (see Figure 1). In the stable graph, the individual's economic trajectory steadily increased over time, with only minor peaks and troughs throughout. By contrast, the economic trajectory in the chaotic graph similarly increased over time but was significantly more tumultuous, with erratic ups and downs. Participants were asked to think about their economic well-being over time—their job, prestige, income, property—and to select the graph that "best represents your expectations for your economic well-being from today on" (0 = *Stable graph*, 1 = *Chaotic graph*). A total of 28 participants in the current study selected the chaotic graph to represent their expectations of the future. A

separate pilot test of 30 individuals verified that the chaotic graph was perceived as significantly more "chaotic" and "random" (1 = *Not at all*, 7 = *Extremely*; $M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.10$) than the stable graph ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.78$), $t(29) = 13.45$, $p < .01$, $d = 3.86$.

Communal orientation. We measured communal orientation using the Communal Orientation Scale (Clark et al., 1987). This 14-item measure assesses people's communal motives toward others—their intentions to care for others and expectations of others to do the same for them. Sample items include, "When I have a need, I turn to others I know for help," and "I expect people I know to be responsive to my needs and feelings," ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.02$, $\alpha = .89$).

Social class. To index social class, we used participants' reported total household income using eight categories: (a) <$15,000, (b) $15,001–$25,000, (c) $25,001–$35,000, (d) $35,001–$50,000, (e) $50,001–$75,000, (f) $75,001–$100,000, (g) $100,001–$150,000, or (h) >$150,000. Participants reported a median household income between $50,001 and $75,000.

Results and Discussion

Participant gender did not interact with social class, future chaos, or with the interaction between these factors in predicting communal orientation (ps > .37). Therefore, we collapsed across gender (gender also did not significantly moderate effects on any of the dependent variables of interest in the subsequent four studies, and in those studies we also report results collapsed across gender).

We first tested whether social class was associated with expectations of future chaos independent of ethnicity (non-European American was coded as 0, and European American was coded as 1) and entered both variables into a binary logistic regression equation. This analysis yielded a marginal effect for ethnicity ($b = -1.08$, $p = .06$), such that European Americans were less inclined to expect future chaos compared to non-European Americans, which may reflect European Americans' reduced exposure to threat and uncertainty in their social environments (e.g., Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002). Results further indicated that upper class individuals were marginally less likely to select the chaotic graph ($b = -0.41$, $p = .10$), suggesting that lower class individuals tended to expect more chaotic futures than upper class individuals.

We next tested our central prediction that future chaos would moderate the relationship between social class and communal orientation. Using a linear regression framework, we regressed communal orientation on social class, future chaos, and their interaction, while controlling for ethnicity and its interaction with future chaos (Yzerbyt,
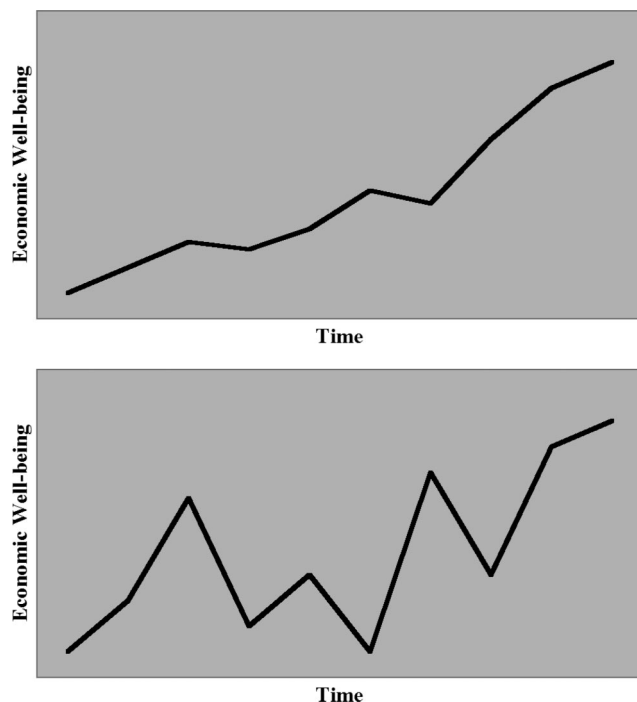

Figure 1. The figures used to assess expectations of a stable future (top panel) or a chaotic future (bottom panel) in Study 1.

[1] In Study 1, we collected a measure of subjective social class rank (Adler et al., 2000) alongside the objective measure of income that we report. The interactive effect of subjective social class by expectations of future chaos on communal orientation paralleled that of income ($b = -0.51$, $t = 1.97$, $p = .05$). In Studies 2–4, we also collected objective and subjective measures of social class. Interestingly, though the predicted pattern was generally consistent across measures of social class, the effects were not consistently significant. Objective and subjective measures of social class most typically only modestly correlate and sometimes yield different associations with outcomes of interest (e.g., Adler et al., 2000; Kraus et al., 2009; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). Future research should clarify the relationship between objective and subjective measures of social class to elucidate the reasons why—and contexts in which—these measures can yield differing effects.

Muller, & Judd, 2004). Social class, future chaos, ethnicity, and the interaction between ethnicity and future chaos did not significantly predict communal orientation ($ps > .63$), but the predicted interaction of social class and future chaos was significant ($b = -0.64$, $t = -2.63$, $p = .01$) and in keeping with our hypothesis that lower class individuals turn to the community to cope with perceived chaos (see Figure 2).[1] For participants who expected a stable future, social class was not associated with communal orientation ($t = 0.04$, $p = .97$, $r = .01$). However, among participants who expected a chaotic future, social class negatively predicted communal orientation ($t = -4.42$, $p < .01$, $r = -.66$).

When expecting chaotic life circumstances, lower class individuals exhibited a more communal social orientation compared to upper class individuals. Although these findings are intriguing, perceptions of chaos were measured and not manipulated. Thus, we cannot conclude that chaos *causes* divergent responses among lower and upper class individuals. We specifically address this limitation by manipulating perceptions of chaos in the subsequent studies.

Study 2: Perceptions of Environmental Chaos Moderate the Relationship Between Social Class and Community Connectedness

Building on the correlational findings from Study 1, in Study 2, we examined whether perceptions of chaos cause lower class individuals to become more connected to their community than their upper class counterparts. We experimentally primed participants with chaotic or nonchaotic features of their social environment. Participants then completed a measure of community connectedness, assessing the degree to which they identified with their community (Mashek, Cannaday, & Tangney, 2007). We predicted that perceptions of chaos (versus control) would cause lower class individuals to become significantly more connected with their community, relative to individuals from upper class backgrounds. Thus, Study 2 builds upon our previous study by experimentally manipulating perceptions of chaos to test their effect on a different measure of orientation to community.

Method

Participants. Seventy-two participants (40 female) were recruited from a major public university campus and received partial
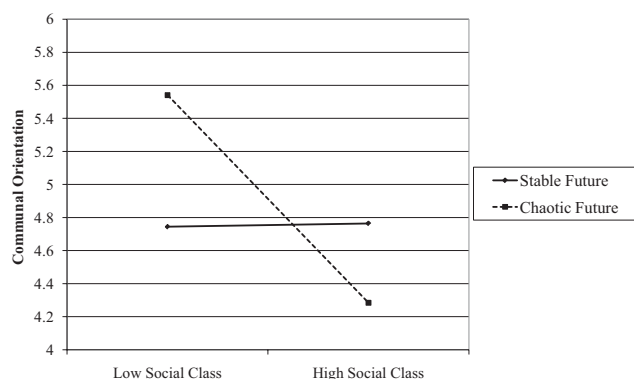

Figure 2. The relationship between social class and communal orientation, moderated by expectations of future chaos (Study 1).

course credit in exchange for participation. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 36 years ($M = 20.29$, $SD = 2.75$). Twenty-seven participants were European American, 28 were Asian American, and the remaining 16 participants were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (one unreported). A sizeable proportion of our sample came from lower class backgrounds: 35% of participants reported annual family incomes below $50,000.

Procedure. After providing consent, participants completed a task that made salient either chaotic or nonchaotic features of the college environment (paralleling Pham et al., 2001). In the chaotic prime condition, participants were reminded of random and chaotic events in their college environment, such as classes sometimes being canceled and the possibility of surprise quizzes. Participants were then asked to list three additional chaotic features of college. In the nonchaotic prime (control) condition, participants read a prompt that emphasized the predictable aspects of college, such as knowing when classes will be held and having access to information about major requirements. Participants were also asked to list three additional nonchaotic aspects of college. Prior research has used this task to evoke perceptions of chaos in the social environment and, in turn, prompt several states related to such perceptions, including reduced self-regulation and increased pulse pressure reactivity, a cardiovascular measure of stress (Pham et al., 2001). Following the priming task, participants completed the dependent measure of community connectedness and provided their demographic information—including their social class—before being debriefed and thanked.

Measures.

Community connectedness. To assess community connectedness, we used the Inclusion of Community in the Self (ICS) Scale (Mashek et al., 2007). This measure presents participants with six pairs of increasingly overlapping circles. In each pair, one circle is labeled "Self" and the other "Community." Participants are asked to select the pair of circles that they feel best represents their relationship with their community. Higher values in this scale reflect higher degrees of community connectedness ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.94$). The ICS is a well-validated and robust measure of the degree to which individuals identify with their community and correlates strongly with multi-item measures of psychological sense of community (Mashek et al., 2007).

Social class. To index social class, we used participants' reported annual family income (e.g., Piff et al., 2010). Income ratings occurred using eight categories: (a) <$15,000, (b) $15,001–$25,000, (c) $25,001–$35,000, (d) $35,001–$50,000, (e) $50,001–$75,000, (f) $75,001–$100,000, (g) $100,001–$150,000, or (h) >$150,000. Participants reported a median family income between $75,001 and $100,000.

Results and Discussion

We predicted that perceptions of environmental chaos would moderate the relationship between social class and community connectedness. To test this, we regressed our measure of community connectedness on social class, the chaos manipulation, and their interaction, while controlling for ethnicity (non-European American was coded as 0, and European American was coded as 1) and its interaction with the chaos manipulation (Yzerbyt et al., 2004). Social class, the chaos manipulation, and the interaction of ethnicity and the chaos manipulation did not

predict community connectedness ($ps > .10$), but European Americans were significantly less connected to their community than non-European Americans ($b = -0.70$, $t = -2.23$, $p < .03$). Importantly, we also observed the expected interaction between social class and the chaos manipulation ($b = -0.52$, $t = -2.33$, $p = .02$; see Figure 3). In the nonchaotic prime condition, social class was unrelated to community connectedness ($t = 1.05$, $p = .30$, $r = .18$). However, when participants were primed with chaotic features of the college environment, social class negatively predicted community connectedness ($t = -2.08$, $p < .05$, $r = -.35$).

Paralleling the results of Study 1, perceptions of environmental chaos caused lower class individuals to become more connected to their community than upper class individuals. Given that perceptions of chaos are generally negative in valence (e.g., Kay et al., 2008; Pham et al., 2001), one unresolved issue is whether it is specifically perceptions of chaos that underlies our pattern of results. Thus, in the following study we employ a more subtle manipulation of chaos and a more rigorous control condition (negative valence) to test whether it is perceptions of chaos, as opposed to negative valence, that drive class-based differences in communal orientation.

Study 3: Perceptions of Chaos Motivate Community Building Among Lower Class Individuals Relative to Upper Class Individuals

Study 3 examined actual intentions to construct community with others in the social environment. Moreover, whereas our first two studies focused on objective social class (income), in the current study, we focused on whether subjective social class rank shapes reactions to perceptions of chaos. We supraliminally primed participants' thoughts of chaos or negative valence (our control condition) prior to asking them whether they would be willing to participate in an optional community-building exercise with a group of their peers. Research argues that simply activating thoughts related to chaos can motivate people to adopt defensive strategies (Kay et al., 2009); however, the specific role of social class in shaping these chaos-related defensive responses is unknown. We predicted that perceptions of chaos would moderate the effects of soci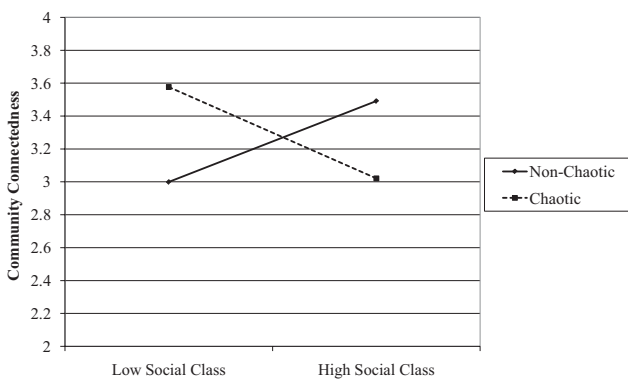al class on intentions to build community, such that when primed with chaos, lower class individuals would become significantly more motivated to construct community, relative to upper class individuals.

Method

Participants. Seventy-seven students (56 female) were recruited through psychology courses on a major public university campus and received partial course credit for participating. Two participants failed to complete the experimental manipulation, leaving a final sample of 75 participants that ranged in age from 18 to 35 years ($M = 20.68$, $SD = 2.73$). Fifteen participants were European American, 40 were Asian American, and 28 participants were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (one unreported).

Procedure. Participants were seated at computers in individual cubicles. After providing consent, participants completed a scrambled sentence task that contained the chaos prime or negative valence control (paralleling Kay et al., 2010). Here, participants were given 16 problems—identical to those used by Kay et al. (2010)—that contained five words in scrambled order and asked to unscramble each set of words to create a four-word sentence. Eight of the 16 problems varied depending on condition. In the chaos prime condition, participants were given eight problems that contained words related to chaos (e.g., "chaotic," "random"). By contrast, the control condition contained eight problems with negative words (e.g., "fear," "slimy"). The order of presentation was randomized such that the problems containing chaos-related or negative words were interspersed with problems containing only neutral words, thus disguising the intent of the study while subtly activating thoughts of chaos versus negative valence (Kay et al., 2010). This allowed us to test whether perceptions of chaos (even when holding negative valence constant) caused diverging motivations toward community building among lower and upper class individuals.

To verify that priming condition successfully induced group differences in feelings of chaos but not negative valence, a separate sample of 23 individuals completed either the chaos or negative valence scrambled sentence task. Using a measure of perceptions of chaos in which participants indicated their agreement with the statement "The world is chaotic" on a 7-point Likert scale ($1 = $ *Strongly disagree*, $7 = $ *Strongly agree*), we verified that the chaos prime condition induced significantly greater feelings of chaos ($M = 5.82$, $SD = 0.87$) than did the negative prime condition ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.42$), $t(21) = 3.15$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.37$. Moreover, a measure of negative affect in which participants indicated the degree to which they were feeling 10 negative emotions (e.g., "nervous," "afraid," "upset"; PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) on a 9-point Likert scale ($1 = $ *No emotion*, $9 = $ *Very much emotion*) confirmed that negative affect did not significantly differ between the chaos prime ($M = 1.68$, $SD = 0.92$) and the negative valence prime ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.81$), $t(19) = -1.00$, $p = .33$.

Following the scrambled sentence task, participants completed the measure of community building and reported their social class and other demographic information. Lastly, participants completed a funnel debriefing (Chartrand & Bargh, 1996). No participants

Figure 3. The relationship between social class and community connectedness, moderated by perceptions of a chaotic environment (Study 2).

noted any suspicion of the priming task or the purpose of the experiment.

Measures.

Desire to build community. We assessed desires to build community by asking participants if they would take part in a "community-building exercise" in which they would become acquainted with five fellow undergraduates upon conclusion of the study (adapted from Vohs et al., 2006). Participants were told that the task would last 5 min, that it was entirely optional, and that they would receive full credit independent of their participation. Our dependent measure of interest was whether participants elected to take part in the community-building exercise (0 = *No, I would not like to take part*, 1 = *Yes, I would like to take part*). This measure captured a commitment to building community in the very simple sense that, by electing to take part, participants would be volunteering their own time for the prospect of becoming acquainted with other students. Twenty-nine participants in the current study (approximately 39% of the sample) chose to participate in the community-building exercise.

Social class. To index social class, we used the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Socioeconomic Status (SES; Adler et al., 2000; Piff et al., 2010). In this measure, participants are presented with a figure of a ladder with 10 rungs representing people with different levels of education, income, and occupational prestige and are instructed to select a rung to represent where they feel they stand relative to others in their community ($M = 6.11$, $SD = 1.74$). Previous research has found that this measure of subjective social class rank predicts patterns in health (e.g., Adler et al., 2000), social cognition (e.g., Kraus et al., 2009), and interpersonal behavior (Piff et al., 2010) consistent with objective, resource-based measures of social class (see also Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011), suggesting that it is an important facet of the social class complex alongside objective indices of social class.

Results and Discussion

We predicted that priming chaos would cause lower class individuals to seek to build community with a group of their peers, relative to upper class individuals. Using a binary logistic framework, we regressed whether participants volunteered to participate in the community-building exercise on social class, priming condition, and their interaction, while controlling for ethnicity (non-European American was coded as 0, and European American was coded as 1) and its interaction with priming condition (Yzerbyt et al., 2004). Social class, priming condition, ethnicity, and the interaction of social class and priming condition did not predict desire to build community ($ps > .40$). However, the predicted interaction of social class and priming condition was significant ($b = -1.19$, $p < .03$; see Figure 4). Specifically, in the negative prime (control) condition, social class was unrelated to community building ($b = 0.26$, $p = .46$, $r = .12$). For individuals primed with chaos, however, social class negatively predicted desires to participate in the community-building exercise ($b = -0.77$, $p = .05$, $r = -.33$).

In sum, feelings of chaos caused lower class individuals to become significantly more motivated to engage in community building relative to their upper class counterparts. These findings emerged while holding negative valence constant, underscoring the specific role of perceptions of chaos in prompting divergences among lower and upper class individuals.
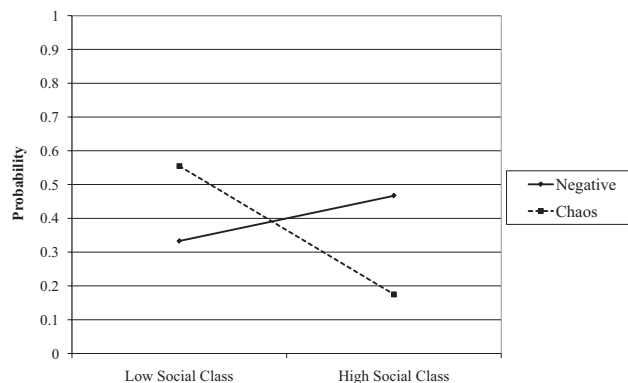

Figure 4. The relationship between social class and the probability of volunteering to participate in community building, moderated by chaos prime (Study 3).

Study 4: Perceptions of Chaos Motivate Reliance Upon Wealth Among Upper Class Individuals Relative to Lower Class Individuals

The previous three studies establish that perceptions of chaos prompt lower class individuals to be more communally oriented, more connected to their community, and more inclined to build community, compared to their upper class counterparts. We have also hypothesized that upper class individuals respond differently to feelings of chaos—a thesis we examine directly in the current study.

Perceptions of chaos signify threat and trigger individuals to rely upon salient coping strategies (e.g., Kay et al., 2010). We propose that a salient and accessible coping strategy among upper class individuals is the reliance upon wealth. This expectation derives from conceptual analyses of the role of increased material resources in buffering the lives of upper class individuals against disruptions (e.g., Kraus et al., 2009; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011; Powell, 2010a, 2010b) and from research finding that upper class individuals prioritize their own material wealth over others' welfare (e.g., Independent Sector, 2002; Piff et al., 2010). Moreover, wealth promotes self-reliance and individual control (Vohs et al., 2006), characteristics that are strongly valued by members of the upper class (Kraus et al., 2009; Lareau, 2003; Stephens et al., 2007). Given these findings and our analysis of class and chaos, we predicted that when faced with chaos, upper class individuals would report a greater reliance on wealth to manage these threatening perceptions. To test this hypothesis, we primed participants with chaos-related or negatively valenced words, as in our previous study, before asking them to indicate the degree to which they rely on and value wealth. We predicted that perceptions of chaos (versus negative valence) would cause upper class individuals to express significantly greater reliance on wealth, compared to their lower class peers.

Method

Participants. One hundred thirty-five undergraduate students (83 female) were recruited via a large public university and completed the study for partial course credit. One participant failed to complete the experimental manipulation, leaving 134 participants,

who ranged in age from 18 to 37 years ($M = 20.07$, $SD = 2.29$). Fifty-two participants were European American, 61 were Asian American, and 38 participants were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (one unreported).

Procedure. The experimental manipulation mirrored that of Study 3. Participants were seated at individual computers and randomly assigned to one of two scrambled sentence priming conditions (chaos versus negative valence words). Following the scrambled sentence task, we assessed participants' self-reported reliance on material wealth. Finally, participants reported their demographic information, including their social class, and completed a funnel debriefing (Chartrand & Bargh, 1996). No participants reported suspicion or knowledge of the experiment's purpose.

Measures.

Reliance upon wealth. To assess reliance upon wealth, we preselected five items from the Obsession subscale of the Money Beliefs and Behavior Scale (MBBS; Furnham, 1984), based on their conceptual relevance to our construct of interest: the degree to which participants deemed wealth to be of personal significance and utility. Sample items included, "I firmly believe that money can solve all of my problems," "I feel that money is the only thing that I can really count on," and "I believe that time not spent in making money is time wasted" (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). Items were averaged to create an overall index of reliance upon wealth ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 0.94$, $\alpha = .74$).

Social class. As in Study 3, we used the MacArthur Scale of Subjective SES (Adler et al., 2000) to index social class. Participants selected a rung on a 10-rung ladder to indicate their socioeconomic status relative to others in their community ($M = 6.79$, $SD = 1.68$).

Results and Discussion

We hypothesized that perceptions of chaos would cause upper class individuals to become more reliant upon wealth, compared to lower class individuals. To test this, we regressed our measure of reliance upon wealth on social class, priming condition, and their interaction, while controlling for ethnicity (non-European American was coded as 0, and European American was coded as 1) and its interaction with priming condition (Yzerbyt et al., 2004). Social class, priming condition, and the interaction of ethnicity and priming condition did not predict reliance upon wealth ($ps > .18$), but European Americans reported decreased reliance upon wealth relative to non-European Americans ($b = -0.52$, $t = -2.22$, $p < .03$). Most importantly, results yielded the predicted interaction between social class and priming condition ($b = 0.37$, $t = 2.37$, $p < .02$; see Figure 5). In the negative prime condition, upper class individuals did not value wealth as a means of adapting to the environment more than their lower class counterparts ($t = -0.73$, $p = .47$, $r = -.09$). However, the chaos prime caused upper class individuals to become significantly more reliant upon wealth, relative to lower class individuals ($t = 2.53$, $p = .01$, $r = .30$).

Complementing the results of Studies 1–3, Study 4 found that feelings of chaos cause upper class individuals to express increased reliance upon wealth, compared to lower class individuals. Material wealth may represent a salient, accessible, and preferred strategy for coping with chaotic conditions among upper class individuals. However, given that lower social class is associated
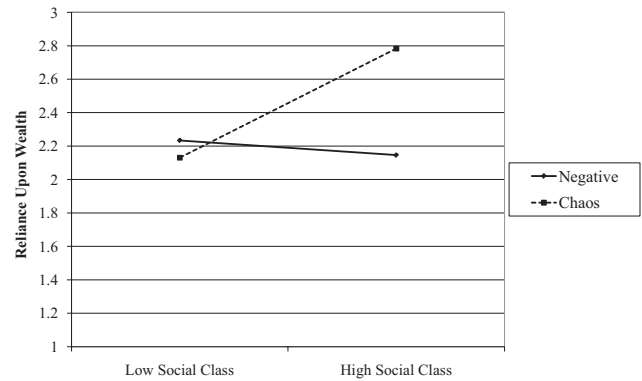

Figure 5. The relationship between social class and reliance upon wealth, moderated by chaos prime (Study 4).

with decreased wealth (e.g., Adler et al., 2000; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011), lower class individuals may simply lack immediate access to material wealth to buffer against perceptions of chaos. Thus, lower class individuals might choose to use material resources to deal with chaos if given the opportunity to. We examine this possibility in the next study.

Study 5: Social Class, Perceptions of Chaos, and Choosing Community or Wealth

Our final study examined class differences in preferences for community belonging or material gain when facing chaotic conditions. Given past findings that childhood and current social class differentially shape reactions to environmental threat (e.g., Griskevicius, Delton, Robertson, & Tybur, 2011), in this study, we used a new measure of social class that allowed us to separately test the role of childhood and current social class in driving our results. Participants were primed with chaos or negative valence before confronting a dilemma that reflected a tradeoff between belonging to a close-knit community and increasing their material wealth. We predicted that even when participants were given equal access to the possibility of material resources, perceptions of chaos (versus negative valence) would cause upper class individuals to be more likely to prefer increasing their wealth over continuing membership in a close-knit community, relative to lower class individuals.

Method

Participants. One hundred fifteen undergraduates (62 female, three unreported) from a large public university completed the study for partial course credit. One participant was excluded due to substantial missing data, leaving 114 participants, who ranged in age from 18 to 36 years ($M = 20.29$, $SD = 2.46$). Thirty-one participants were European American, 67 were Asian American, and 23 participants were African American, Latino/a, Native American, or other ethnicity (three unreported).

Procedure. Paralleling Studies 3 and 4, participants were seated in private computer terminals and randomly assigned to one of two scrambled sentence tasks in which thoughts of either chaos or negative valence were primed. Participants then responded to a hypothetical job scenario in which they were confronted with a

dilemma: a choice between prioritizing community or prioritizing material gain. Participants were also asked to write a few sentences explaining the reasons for their choice. Participants then completed demographics, including the measure of social class (e.g., Griskevicius, Delton, et al., 2011), and a funnel debriefing (Chartrand & Bargh, 1996). No participant reported suspicion or knowledge of the experiment's purpose.

Measures.

Choosing community or monetary gain.   To assess whether participants would be willing to forego membership in a close-knit community for financial gain, participants were given a hypothetical job scenario that effectively pitted a desire to continue belonging to a close-knit community against a desire to increase one's material wealth. Participants were asked to imagine as vividly as possible that they worked at a job where they had established a community of tight-knit friendships with their coworkers: "You work well together, support each other, and enjoy spending time with each other outside of work." The scenario then stated that one day they received a job offer from the company's president to transition to a higher paying job at a different branch, which would require them to move to another city and likely cause them to lose touch with their close friends and coworkers. Participants were asked to indicate whether they would take this new job (0 = *No*, 1 = *Yes*). This choice reflected a tradeoff between belonging to a close-knit community and enhancing one's material wealth and, as such, assessed participants' willingness to forego their current community in order to earn a higher salary. Eighty-one participants (approximately 71% of the sample) indicated that they would take the new higher paying job.

Reasons for decision.   In addition to indicating whether they would accept or decline the job offer, participants wrote a brief description of the reasons for their decision. For example, one participant wrote, "I would take the job. You can always make new close friends, but the opportunity to make more money may not always be there." Another participant wrote, "Friendship is more valuable than money to me. I can't leave those friends that I have been working with for a long time."

Each narrative was rated by three independent coders (2 female), who were blind to participants' social class and condition, in terms of the degree to which the participant expressed that concerns about increasing his or her wealth (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a great deal*) and losing touch with his or her current community (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a great deal*) had factored into the decision. Coders' ratings were highly correlated and reliable for both concerns about wealth (*r*s > .73, *p*s < .01, α = .92) and concerns about community (*r*s > .87, *p*s < .01, α = .96). Coders' ratings were summed and averaged (concerns about increasing wealth: *M* = 4.09, *SD* = 1.68; concerns about losing community: *M* = 2.96, *SD* = 1.84).

Social class.   To index social class, participants reported their childhood and current social class by rating their agreement with five statements on a 7-point scale (e.g., Griskevicius, Delton, et al., 2011; 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). Childhood social class was measured with the following items: "My family usually had enough money for things when I was growing up," "I grew up in a relatively wealthy neighborhood," and "I felt relatively wealthy compared to the other kids in my school." The items for current social class were "I have enough money to buy things I want" and "I don't worry too much about paying my bills."

A principal-axis factor analysis using varimax rotation of the five social class items yielded a single factor with an eigenvalue above 1.0 (2.99) that accounted for 60% of the variance. All factor loadings exceeded .58. Moreover, the measures for childhood social class (*M* = 4.66, *SD* = 1.39, α = .77) and current social class (*M* = 4.61, *SD* = 1.58, α = .77) were highly correlated, *r*(112) = .58, *p* < .01, and the five items demonstrated high internal consistency (α = .82). Thus, we formed a composite measure by averaging the five childhood and current social class items (*M* = 4.64, *SD* = 1.29). Scores on this measure ranged from 1 to 7, indicating that our sample represented the full spectrum of social class backgrounds. We also conducted supplemental analyses for childhood and current social class separately to investigate their specific roles in driving our results.

Results and Discussion

Primary analyses.   Our central prediction was that priming chaos would cause upper class individuals to be more likely to accept the new higher paying job, relative to lower class individuals. We tested this hypothesis using a binary logistic framework in which we regressed whether participants indicated they would accept the new job on social class, priming condition, and their interaction, while controlling for ethnicity (non-European American was coded as 0, and European American was coded as 1) and its interaction with ethnicity (Yzerbyt et al., 2004). Social class, priming condition, ethnicity, and the interaction of ethnicity and priming condition did not predict the likelihood of accepting the new job (*p*s > .37). However, the predicted interaction of social class and priming condition was significant (*b* = 0.92, *p* < .05; see Figure 6). In the negative prime condition, social class was unrelated to the likelihood of accepting the new job (*b* = −0.13, *p* = .66, *r* = −.06). Among participants primed with chaos, however, social class predicted an increased likelihood of accepting the new job (*b* = 0.64, *p* < .05, *r* = .27). These results suggest that priming chaos caused upper class individuals to prefer the opportunity for financial gain over the option of remaining in their close-knit community, relative to lower class individuals.

We next examined participants' reasons for accepting or declining the job offer. We hypothesized that when primed with chaos, upper class participants would express a heightened concern with
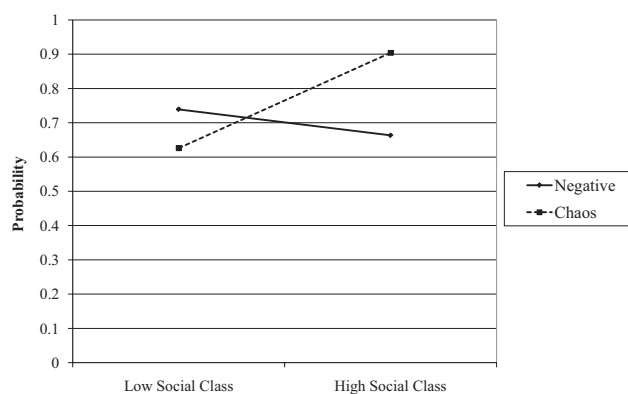
Figure 6.   The relationship between social class and the probability of accepting the new job, moderated by chaos prime (Study 5).

increasing wealth relative to lower class participants, whereas lower class participants would express a heightened concern over losing their current community, compared to upper class participants. We regressed our codes of participants' narratives on social class, priming condition, and their interaction, while controlling for ethnicity and its interaction with priming condition. Ethnicity and the interaction of ethnicity and priming condition were not significant predictors of concerns about wealth ($ps > .10$), but there were marginal effects for both social class ($b = -0.44$, $t = -1.87$, $p = .06$) and priming condition ($b = 0.69$, $t = 1.90$, $p = .06$), such that lower class individuals and individuals in the chaos prime condition tended to express greater concerns about wealth. Importantly, the interaction of social class and condition did not predict concerns about wealth ($b = 0.44$, $t = 1.34$, $p = .18$). This suggests that perceptions of chaos had comparable effects on explicit concerns about increasing wealth regardless of participants' social class.

Parallel analyses for expressed concerns about losing community yielded nonsignificant effects for social class, priming condition, ethnicity, and the interaction between ethnicity and priming condition ($ps > .15$). However, the predicted interaction of social class and priming condition was significant ($b = -0.86$, $t = -2.37$, $p = .02$). Among participants in the negative prime condition, social class was unrelated to expressing concerns about losing community ($t = 0.75$, $p = .46$, $r = .11$). By contrast, when primed with chaos, lower class participants expressed significantly greater concern about losing touch with their current coworkers and friends than did their upper class counterparts ($t = -2.12$, $p < .04$, $r = -.27$). These results indicate that priming chaos caused lower class individuals to become more concerned about giving up their close-knit community than upper class individuals.

Mediated moderation.　We also tested whether expressed concerns about wealth/community explain why the association between social class and likelihood of accepting the job offer varied by priming condition. Support for concerns about wealth/community as mediators of the interactive effect of social class and priming condition on job decisions can be inferred if four separate criteria are met, as outlined by Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt (2005): First, the interaction of Social Class × Priming Condition on job decisions should be significant; second, the interaction of Social Class × Priming Condition on concerns about wealth/community should be significant; third, concerns about wealth/community should significantly predict job decisions; and finally, the effect of the Social Class × Condition interaction on job decisions should be reduced in magnitude when concerns about wealth/community are entered in the model.

The results (described above) that condition moderated the association between social class and job decisions indicate that the first criterion was met. Moreover, the results (also described above) that condition did not moderate the association between social class and concerns about increasing wealth but did moderate the association between social class and concerns about losing community indicate that the second criterion was met only for concerns about community, whereas concerns about wealth could not be a mediator. In a separate regression model that included ethnicity, social class, condition, the interaction of ethnicity and condition, and the interaction of social class and condition as predictors of job decisions, concerns about community were a significant predictor ($b = -1.53$, $p < .01$), whereas the interaction

of social class and condition became nonsignificant ($b = 0.03$, $p = .97$), indicating that the third and fourth criteria for mediation were met for concerns about community. As a final step, we used the bootstrapping method (with 10,000 iterations) recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008) to test the significance of the indirect effect of the Social Class × Priming Condition interaction on job decisions through concerns about losing community. The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect included 0 (range: -0.2060 to 3.9515), but the 90% confidence interval did not include 0 (range: 0.0181 to 2.9318), suggesting that concerns about community were a marginal mediator of the relationship between social class and priming condition on job decisions.

Supplemental analyses.　In addition to our primary analyses, we parsed the data by examining possible interactions between priming condition and childhood versus current social class on our central dependent variable: likelihood of accepting the new job. This allowed us to test the specific influence of each type of social class on responses to chaos. Current social class did not significantly interact with priming condition ($p = .24$), suggesting that perceptions of chaos had comparable effects on job decisions regardless of participants' current social class.

By contrast, childhood social class interacted significantly with priming condition for likelihood of taking the new job ($b = 1.20$, $p < .02$). In the negative valence prime condition, childhood social class was not related to likelihood of accepting the new job ($b = -0.18$, $p = .53$, $r = -.09$). However, in the chaos prime condition, individuals with higher childhood social class were more likely to accept the new job ($b = 0.75$, $p = .02$, $r = .32$), relative to individuals with lower childhood social class. These results indicate that participants' childhood social class especially affected responses to perceptions of chaos in the current study.

Discussion.　When primed with feelings of chaos, upper class individuals became more likely to choose an opportunity to increase their wealth over membership in a close-knit community, relative to lower class individuals, who instead opted to remain in their close-knit community. These findings suggest that class differences in response to perceptions of chaos extend beyond the accessibility (or inaccessibility) of material resources. Rather, lower class individuals may actually choose community over wealth in dealing with perceptions of chaos. This interpretation is bolstered by our finding that perceptions of chaos caused lower class individuals to become more concerned about losing community than upper class individuals, and class differences in concerns about community mediated, in part, the relationship between social class and priming condition on job decisions. Interestingly, our results did not yield parallel effects for concerns about increasing wealth. One reason for this null finding may be that social desirability concerns dissuaded upper class participants from confessing their materialistic desires (Mick, 1996), instead citing related concerns (e.g., desires for career advancement) as having shaped their decision.

Finally, when we parsed our data by type of social class (childhood versus current), we found that job decisions were particularly driven by childhood social class. Studies find that responses to environmental threat are significantly shaped by the individual's social class and resource availability during childhood (Griskevicius, Delton, et al., 2011; Griskevicius, Tybur, Delton, & Robertson, 2011). Responses to chaotic conditions may also be especially sensitive to childhood social class, particularly among college

students—such as those in the current study—whose current social class is not as meaningful as it is for older, more established individuals.

General Discussion

Fluctuations in the economy, climate, family dynamics, work life, and health reveal how integral perceptions of chaos and randomness are to living. Years of research have documented the significant stress associated with perceptions of chaos and how managing such stress is a fundamental life task (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Kay et al., 2010, 2009; Lerner, 1980; Pennebaker & Stone, 2004; Peterson, 1999; Pham et al., 2001). Building on this empirical tradition, the current investigation examined the impact of social class on how people respond to perceptions of chaos in their social environments and outcomes. We tested whether lower class individuals orient to others in the social environment—their community—to manage feelings of chaos, compared to upper class individuals, who instead become relatively more oriented toward—and prioritizing of—wealth.

Five studies yielded results that accord with these predictions. When expecting high degrees of chaos and randomness in life outcomes, lower class individuals were significantly more communal than were upper class individuals (Study 1). Experimentally inducing perceptions of chaos caused lower class individuals to become more connected to their community (Study 2) and more disposed to build community with others (Study 3), relative to upper class individuals. By contrast, perceptions of chaos caused upper class individuals to express more reliance upon material wealth (Study 4) and choose an opportunity for financial gain over community belonging (Study 5), relative to lower class individuals. These results argue that broad differences in the material and social conditions of lower and upper class individuals' lives shape the specific strategies they use to buffer against unstable and chaotic life circumstances.

Results generalized across student and nationwide adult samples, using assessments of objective resources (e.g., income) and subjective social class rank (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). Findings held while accounting for compelling alternative explanations of our findings (e.g., negative valence) and when perceptions of chaos were measured (Study 1) and manipulated (Studies 2–5). We used diverse instantiations of our outcomes of interest to capture responses to chaos, including different assessments of orientations toward community (Studies 1–3) and material wealth (Studies 4–5). The consistency of these results across operationalizations underscores the robustness of these findings.

Limitations and Future Directions

Past theory and research argued that the distinct social ecologies associated with different social class groups shape social and cognitive tendencies in profound ways (Kraus et al., 2009, 2012; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011; Piff et al., 2010, 2012; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Stephens et al., 2007). In particular, the relatively reduced resources and rank associated with lower class standing give rise to increased other-focus, interpersonal engagement, and sensitivity to others' welfare. By contrast, the relatively increased resources and rank associated with upper class standing shape

increased self-focus, interpersonal distance, and a prioritization of self-interest (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011).

The results from the present investigation dovetail with this prior work and expand upon it in important ways. Specifically, our findings show that the divergent social-cognitive tendencies of lower and upper class individuals extend to whether they orient to social or material resources when chaotic forces threaten their lives. These distinct responses are likely the result of a confluence of both psychological and structural factors. As we have highlighted, class differences in other-focused versus self-focused cognition should shape differential tendencies toward—and proficiencies with—orienting to others versus relying on oneself in times of threat. Different values, for instance those related to assimilation among the lower class versus autonomy among the upper class (e.g., Lareau, 2003; Stephens et al., 2007), may also play a role. Upper class individuals' relative independence from others may render individual means of coping more cognitively accessible, and their increased wealth may provide them with both the material resources and experience using those resources to deal with threat. By contrast, the relative lack of material resources may cause lower class individuals to seek out social support in times of threat, and their increased other-focus may make them more adept at doing so. Moreover, the distinct ecologies of different social classes may create and reinforce cognitive schemas that differentially favor collective versus individual forms of coping.

In thinking about these results, it is notable that divergences toward community and wealth did not emerge in the control conditions, when perceived chaos was not primed. One possible explanation arises from the nature of our dependent measures. As discussed throughout this article, prior research finds that lower and upper class individuals are more other- and self-focused, respectively. Research has documented class differences, for instance, in preferences for being similar to others (Stephens et al., 2007), nonverbal signs of social engagement (Kraus & Keltner, 2009), and prosocial behavior (Piff et al., 2010, 2012). Although these findings set the stage for our predictions, we examined a distinct set of effects: communal orientation and community connectedness, a desire to build community, reliance upon wealth, and preferences for wealth over community. These outcomes reflect people's explicit attitudes and intentions toward community and wealth, as opposed to simply self- and other-focused social-cognitive tendencies, and thus should not be expected to necessarily relate to social class in neutral conditions.

There is also evidence indicating that the relationship between social class and explicit measures of interdependence and community connectedness in neutral conditions is inconsistent. For instance, social class is not invariably associated with traditional self-report measures of interdependent self-construal (e.g., Stephens et al., 2007; Study 1). Other research finds that lower class individuals sometimes report feeling less connected to others than their upper class counterparts (for a review, see S. E. Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011). Such findings paint a more nuanced picture, indicating that broad class differences in patterns of self- and other-focus and social connectedness may vary according to specific circumstances and contexts. One of the key points of the current research is that perceptions of chaos caused lower class individuals to become more oriented to community, relative to upper class individuals, who instead became relatively prioritizing of wealth, even though these divergences were not detectable in

neutral conditions. This consistent finding suggests that class differences in orientations to community and wealth are especially likely to emerge in conditions characterized by chaos and threat. The present findings are consistent with research showing that class divergences in reproductive timing and risk preference emerge only under particular conditions, such as mortality threat (Griskevicius, Delton, et al., 2011; Griskevicius, Tybur, et al., 2011).

That class differences in orientations to community and wealth manifested specifically in situations of threat also helps elucidate other documented class-related differences in social behavior. For example, prior research has found that lower class individuals are more prosocial than are upper class individuals (Piff et al., 2010, 2012). Although selflessness on the part of the lower class could seem to defy rationality, our findings point to a deeper logic underlying their other-focused behaviors. Specifically, lower class individuals may focus on others in an effort to establish social bonds that are vital to their coping *when* faced with environmental threat. Altruism—though costly in the short term—may enable lower class individuals to establish communal relationships, in part to ensure that they can turn to others when their welfare is jeopardized (for evidence on the social benefits of generosity, see Klapwijk & Van Lange, 2009). A similar dynamic may underlie the increased self-interested and materialistic behavior of upper class individuals, who may prioritize wealth in part because it is their preferred resource for coping with threat.

Several extensions of the current research seem promising. One important issue to explore is the parallel between the current research and prior findings that lower class individuals are particularly reactive to social threat. Relative to upper class individuals, lower class individuals exhibit increased physiological reactivity, anger, and hostility in response to threatening social situations (Chen, Langer, Raphaelson, & Matthews, 2004; Chen & Matthews, 2001; Kraus, Horberg, Goetz, & Keltner, 2011). Our findings suggest that the specific responses exhibited by lower class individuals may largely depend on the source and nature of the threat. Whereas feelings of chaos and randomness may motivate reliance on community, threats of a social nature may actually diminish lower class individuals' communal social tendencies—an intriguing area for future research.

Prior research found that social and material resources can buffer individuals from threat and help sustain well-being in times of stress (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Chang & Arkin, 2002; Kulik, Mahler, & Moore, 1996; Taylor, 2006; Uchino et al., 1996; Zhou et al., 2009). We posit that relying on community or material wealth is a way for people to both psychologically protect themselves from feelings of chaos (and thereby reduce distress) and facilitate coping. However, future research should delineate the more specific ways in which community and wealth can serve these functions. It would be interesting to test, for instance, whether contact with community members or material wealth differentially buffer lower and upper class individuals from the distress associated with feelings of chaos. Relying on community or wealth may also reduce the levels of chaos people actually face, by granting them access to aid and assistance from others (in the case of relying on community) or a tool for achieving desired goals and outcomes (in the case of relying on wealth). Furthermore, examining lower and upper class individuals' reasons for orienting to community or wealth when threatened could illuminate the specific motivations underlying these responses.

Finally, building on research showing that feelings of chaos cause people to imbue their external environments with order, as a form of compensatory control (Kay et al., 2008, 2010), research should also examine whether social class differentiates people in terms of the specific social domains (e.g., the economy, their relationships) they project structure upon. In this vein, additional work should delineate whether the class differences we document as a function of perceptions of chaos generalize to other forms of uncertainty, such as uncertainty about one's personal traits and characteristics (McGregor & Marigold, 2003; McGregor et al., 2001). The threat of personal uncertainty can motivate individuals to restore order to their self-concept, for instance by idealizing their relationships (Marigold, McGregor, & Zanna, 2010) or perceiving their material possessions as more self-expressive (Morrison & Johnson, 2011). Whether social class underlies differential responses to personal uncertainty (e.g., increased idealization of relationships versus wealth) is an important future direction.

Conclusion

Social class is a potent cultural force, shaping how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to their environments. We find that when coping with perceptions of chaos, lower class individuals tend to prioritize community, relative to upper class individuals, who instead prioritize wealth. Future research should build on these findings to further understand how disparities in resources and rank shape people's responses to threat and people's strategies for reestablishing order amid life's inevitable chaos.

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