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# Thrift and Thriving in America: Capitalism and Moral Order from the Puritans to the Present

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19 }

## Middle-Class Respectability in Twenty-First-Century America

WORK AND LIFESTYLE IN THE  
PROFESSIONAL-MANAGERIAL STRATUM

Steven Brint and Kristopher Proctor

Before the Great Recession of 2008, it appeared that we in the United States were living in a "postthrift" society. On many contemporary measures—from low individual savings rates to soaring levels of consumer debt to a ballooning national deficit—there were good empirical reasons to think so. It was tempting to conclude that the virtue of thrift in its classical sense as frugality had been largely forgotten. At least we heard little of it, especially from the educated professionals and managers who were once its chief proponents. Indeed, a popular notion existed that highly educated professionals were more liberal in their spending habits, as well as more free-thinking in their moral outlooks, than other Americans. They were cast by some as a "new class" or "new elite" opposed to traditional bourgeois virtues.<sup>1</sup>

The Great Recession changed the circumstances of professionals and managers. Some lost their jobs or their clients, and their savings rates, like those of other Americans, began to rise. Yet as the country crept out of its recessionary woes, professionals and managers—who were in any event among the least affected—began to return, however chastened and cautiously, to the styles of life they had practiced in the pre-crash years.

As other essays in this volume attest, the meanings of thrift have shifted with transformations in the structure and expression of capitalism throughout American history; accordingly, we find members of the professional-managerial stratum enacting thrift in different ways today than did their nineteenth-century predecessors. To see the importance of the professional-managerial stratum for the unfolding story of thrift in the present era, it is essential to understand how historical forms of thrift (and, in particular, frugality) are but one historical expression of society's sense of what it means to practice thrift in its original sense—as the attitudes and behaviors conducive to *thriving* in society.

462

## Two Eras of Professionalism

Professionalism was transformed during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The professional stratum grew dramatically, as more and more people in new specialized occupations requiring advanced training—from agronomists and city planners to investment counselors and management consultants—claimed professional status based on their educational qualifications, the intellectual skills and formal knowledge those qualifications conveyed, and standards of ethical conduct promulgated by their professional associations.<sup>2</sup> In Magali Sarfatti Larson's apt phrase, many occupations engaged in "collective mobility projects" by finding a place in university curricula, adopting licensing requirements, and walling off jurisdictions of practice based on a monopoly of qualified practitioners.<sup>3</sup>

For the historian Burton Bledstein, the "culture of professionalism" during this period emphasized the material comforts, respectability, and career ambitions of middle-class life. Middle-class respectability and striving were combined with ideals of rationalism, mental concentration, self-control, and the dedicated commitment to work that was the mark of a distinctively intellectualized form of asceticism. "A person's work was more than an unrelated series of jobs and projects. . . . Work was the person: a statement to the world of his internal resources, confidence, and discipline; his active control over the intrinsic relationships of a life, his steadfast character."<sup>4</sup> The model professional was "self-reliant, independent, ambitious, and mentally organized." He was also highly protective of the autonomy he was granted in the name of a "specialized grasp of a meaningful universe."<sup>5</sup> As compared with businessmen of similar economic standing, professionals shared little among themselves but a claim to autonomy on the job based on their advanced educational training and a penchant for rationalizing social relations around a body of formal knowledge.

At first, the ideology of fiduciary responsibilities to society continued as part of professionals' claim for respect and deference.<sup>6</sup> The classic expression of this ideology is found in a passage by R. H. Tawney written in the 1920s:

[Professionals] may, as in the case of the successful doctor, grow rich, but the meaning of their profession, both for themselves and for the public, is not that they make money, but that they make health, or safety, or knowledge, or good government, or good law. . . . [Professions uphold] as the criterion of success the end for which the profession, whatever it may be, is carried on, and [subordinate] the inclination, appetites, and ambition of individuals to the rules of an organization which has as its object to promote the performance of function.<sup>7</sup>

For Tawney and many other advocates for the professions, these "functions" were activities that embodied and expressed the idea of larger social purposes. Of course, the expression of high-minded ideals in public settings might very well go hand in hand with conspicuous displays of extravagance at the private banquets that immediately followed. For all their expressions of devotion to ideals of service, it is an open question whether professionals were in fact any more self-denying than businessmen of similar social rank.

A second important ideal developed in the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an alternative to "social trustee professionalism." This ideal of "expert professionalism" emphasized the instrumental effectiveness of specialized, theoretically grounded knowledge, and it included comparatively little concern with collegial organization, ethical standards, or service in the public interest. Experts applied skills and judgment to problems defined by others. Experts justified themselves on the basis of productivity and progress, not on their contributions to values underlying social order. Gradually, and with an increasing pace from the 1960s on, expressions of the high-minded ideals of "social trustee professionalism" gave way and were replaced by this less socially conscious stance of "expert professionalism." Expert professionalism eschewed a broader social legitimacy and, therefore, provided no moral glue to bind a class.

As professional ideals and political outlooks splintered,<sup>8</sup> perhaps the only element that remained constant was the striving for middle-class respectability. But the contours of what it meant to embody "middle-class respectability" changed in the later twentieth century. Middle-class respectability required self-discipline in activities related to professional training, work, community life, and family social reproduction, but it allowed self-expression and pleasure seeking in activities related to consumption. There was, in this sense, a tension between self-restraint and self-expression, albeit a tension most professionals and managers found easy enough to reconcile.

### Defining the Professional-Managerial Stratum

Some brief words of definition are in order. Professional occupations include all those involving nonroutine mental work, usually based on training in an academic discipline, leading to a high degree of autonomy in the workplace and requiring judgment based on both work experience and academic training for the analysis and solution of work-related problems.<sup>9</sup> Professional occupations range from certified public accountants and tax lawyers to fiction writers, ministers, and professors. They also include scientists and engineers, architects and urban planners, therapists, schoolteachers, nurses, and social workers. Educated managers share some of these occupational characteristics (autonomy, work on complex problems, formal training) but are, in addition,

expected to keep the broad organizational vision in mind, to advocate organizational teamwork, and to show loyalty to the organizational chain of command. The consequences of holding organizational authority do in some respects distinguish managers from nonmanaging professionals. In terms of their political attitudes and party identifications, for example, the two are clearly distinct; managers are much more likely to say they are conservatives and to identify with the Republican Party.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, highly educated professionals and managers can be defined as a distinct stratum, even as a "social class" in the Weberian sense: They have common educational experiences and work in occupations of similar prestige. They interact on familiar and more or less equal terms. They live in the same neighborhoods. And their children intermarry.

The stratum is defined by the conjunction of occupational and educational characteristics. It includes all those in professional and managerial occupations who hold baccalaureate or higher level degrees. This grouping includes 80 percent of census professionals and 50 percent of census managers<sup>11</sup>—altogether just over 15 percent of the U.S. labor force.<sup>12</sup> Overlapping with the professional-managerial stratum in income and wealth are independent small business people who have made their way without the benefit of higher education. Below it lie the vast majority of Americans who work in technician, sales, clerical, blue-collar or service occupations. Above it stand the 1 percent or so of the wealthy whose fortunes derive from executive positions, celebrity, or inheritance.

### Professional-Managerial Culture: Is Self-Expression All?

Many conservatives subscribe to the idea that highly educated professionals have become opponents of bourgeois virtues, because they follow the lead of intellectuals rather than businesspeople. But the empirical evidence does not support this claim. Far from following a liberal-spending and hedonistic ethos, highly educated professionals show a profile of moderation consistent with their interests in middle-class respectability. The same can be said for highly educated managers. We can show this by comparing their behavior on measures of economic and behavioral restraint to those of other Americans.

### ECONOMIC RESTRAINT

Indebtedness is largely a function of (low) income. Consumer goods and services cost more than they have in the past. Controlling for inflation, the median earner in the United States has essentially the same income now and as he or she had twenty-five years earlier, and the incomes of the bottom fifth have declined.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, a disproportionate increase in credit card debt has

occurred among lower-income Americans—those with annual incomes less than \$25,000.<sup>14</sup> Many low-income families are carrying credit card debt nearly half the size of the family's annual income. Bankruptcy follows a similar course. The average earnings of chapter 7 bankruptcy filers in 1996 were \$19,800, and they held a slightly higher-than-average amount of credit card debt—\$17,500.<sup>15</sup> People who declare bankruptcy are spread across the spectrum of American society, but they are distinct in one way: their incomes are much lower than those of the average family. The causes of low income are numerous but most often involve loss of work, high credit card balances, divorce, losses on housing, and unexpected or uninsured health expenses.<sup>16</sup>

Savings rates are also income-sensitive. The year 2005 was the first year since the Great Depression that Americans spent more than they earned.<sup>17</sup> The average personal savings rate was at -0.4 percent, down from +2 percent in 2004.<sup>18</sup> Following the stock market collapse of 2008, personal savings rates moved back into positive territory.<sup>19</sup> More than one-quarter of families live from paycheck to paycheck.<sup>20</sup> The only economic variable significantly related to savings is income; education is not positively related to savings once income is controlled.<sup>21</sup> If professionals and managers save more than others, it is because they have more income than others.

Although professionals and managers are not in the vanguard of economic waste, neither are they at the head of the class in wealth accumulation. Studies suggest that the classic wealth accumulator is a self-employed entrepreneur, who spends many hours on financial planning, knows as much as any expert about investing, and does not care for lavish material displays.<sup>22</sup> These wealth accumulators tend to live on 7 percent or less of their net worth each year, and surprisingly few drive expensive cars or own expensive suits, watches, or shoes. Many professionals earn high salaries, but they do not necessarily spend long hours on financial planning, and they do not necessarily live frugally. One study of high-income earners (those earning at least \$100,000 in the mid-1990s) found a *negative* relationship between education and wealth accumulation. The authors suggest that social expectations make a difference:

Doctors, lawyers, accountants and (other professionals) are expected to live in expensive homes. They also are expected to dress and drive in a style congruent with their ability to perform their professional duties. . . . Many people judge professionals by display factors. Extra points are given to those who wear expensive clothes, drive luxury automobiles, and live in exclusive neighborhoods. They assume a professional is likely to be mediocre, even incompetent, if he lives in a modest home and drives an old car.<sup>23</sup>

The same could be as aptly said of corporate managers. Net of other significant covariates, total real consumption is significantly higher for people with high

incomes and college educations, for those who are married and have children, and for people who live in cities.<sup>24</sup>

#### BEHAVIORAL RESTRAINT

Professionals and managers are not, on balance, more hedonistic than other Americans, and on most measures they are less so. Social drinking, for example, is widespread in American society. According to the General Social Survey (GSS) 1991-99 (the last time these issues were addressed in the GSS), white-collar workers (including professionals and managers) were somewhat more likely than blue-collar workers to say they have ever had a drink (roughly 75 percent compared with 60 percent) but less likely to say they ever drank to excess. Perhaps because of travel, managers and business professionals (such as marketing specialists) were more likely than others to say they spent time in a bar at least once a month. Human services professionals (such as teachers and social workers) were less likely to say they had had a drink or spent time at a bar.<sup>25</sup>

The use of non-prescription drugs is much less common among Americans than social drinking. No groups are very likely to say they use non-prescription drugs, though, judging from police statistics, the use of hard drugs is more common among the poor. Many college students experiment with marijuana, but few use it later in life.<sup>26</sup> The use of sleeping pills and neuroenhancers, however, may be higher among professionals and managers than among people from other strata in American society.<sup>27</sup>

Professionals have been slightly less likely than others to be gamblers or to participate in lotteries, though all strata in American society include a sizable portion of recreational gamblers. In the 1990s and early 2000s, more than 80 percent of Americans said they had gambled during the last year, but only about one-quarter said they gambled weekly.<sup>28</sup> Higher SES groups were less likely to gamble often, and they were more likely to wager small amounts.<sup>29</sup> Lottery participation rates were also high (near or above 50 percent) in all occupational groups.<sup>30</sup> but again higher SES groups were less likely to participate and those who did participate spent smaller amounts.<sup>31</sup>

By contrast, the attitudes of professionals and managers toward sex are comparatively liberal-minded; they have, for example, been less likely than members of other strata to frown on premarital sex, to think of homosexuality as intolerable, or to think that using pornography leads to moral breakdown.<sup>32</sup> These more liberal attitudes are associated, not only with higher levels of education, but with lower levels of religiosity, urban residence, and youth. Those who work in the arts and culture industries have distinctly more liberal attitudes about sex than other professionals or managers.<sup>33</sup> Conventional mores, however, tend to rule when it comes to sexual behavior. According to GSS data

from the 1990s and early 2000s, married people regardless of job category rarely admit to sexual behaviors that break the vows of marriage. Minorities of unmarried professionals and managers reported behaviors that could be interpreted as treating sex in a casual manner. Such behaviors include having had a one-night sexual encounter in the last year (35 percent), having had sex with an acquaintance in the last year (31 percent), or ever having paid for or been paid for sex (9 percent). Less than one-quarter of professionals or managers said they had had twelve or more sexual partners in their lifetimes. The figures for unmarried professionals and managers were similar to those for unmarried people from other social strata.<sup>34</sup>

In sum, because educated professionals and managers have more to lose than most people, they are more likely to be prudent about finances and less likely than others to engage in behaviors that could become costly. Traditional norms of middle-class respectability, dating from the nineteenth century, remain strong in some areas, such as personal finance. They have changed in other areas due to the widespread acceptance of social drinking, recreational gambling, and sexual pleasure. These practices, evident in the 1920s among young, highly educated urbanites, became accepted in the broader U.S. adult population by the mid-1970s.<sup>35</sup>

### Social Theory and Professional-Managerial Culture

What, then, are the truly distinctive patterns of work and lifestyle in the professional-managerial stratum? And how do these patterns reflect contemporary conditions for thriving?

Sociological theory provides a few useful heuristics for answering these questions. The work of Daniel Bell is particularly notable because Bell was the first sociologist to illuminate the duality in contemporary American culture between self-discipline at work and self-expression in consumption, a keynote also of our interpretation. Bell argued that self-discipline and deferred gratification were necessary to produce and reproduce economic success in a competitive capitalist society. At the same time, self-expression and pleasure seeking were avidly promoted by consumer marketing and encouraged also by affluence. Bell worried that consumer culture, following the trail blazed by nineteenth-century bohemian intellectuals' rejections of bourgeois virtues, could subvert the self-discipline required to maintain a highly productive capitalist economy. For Bell, the tensions between self-denial and pleasure seeking represented the "cultural contradictions of capitalism."<sup>36</sup>

Our interpretation is influenced by Bell's sense of tension between the spheres of work and leisure.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Bell, however, we see no contradiction between the norms of the workplace and those of the consumer marketplace. Indeed, self-discipline at work and pleasure seeking in consumption may

reflect the natural disposition of people living in a society simultaneously defined by "bureaucratic-corporate" and mass-consumption values, and this combination should be particularly prevalent among those who are among the most responsible for, and have among the most to gain from, this society.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, an element of play exists in the work, and an element of work in the play, of professionals and managers. Nor is it always possible to separate discipline and pleasure; many people report strong feelings of pleasure in performing acts that might seem to require self-denial, such as helping others through community volunteering.<sup>39</sup> Thus, against Bell we argue that self-restraint and self-expression are neither decisively separated in the spheres of work and leisure nor necessarily opposed in orientation. Work governs the material conditions of life and provides discipline-based opportunities for self-realization; consumption and community relationships govern ideal representations of self (and family) and provide expression-based opportunities for self-realization. They are in harmony more than they are in tension, because self-realization is attainable mainly by those who are both highly self-disciplined and capable of non-conformity in thought and action.

Our interpretation also draws selectively on the work of Pierre Bourdieu. As an analyst of taste cultures, Bourdieu focused on the distribution of two forms of "capital." Economic capital (measured by income and wealth) disposed its holders toward conspicuous status display through purchase of expensive consumer goods, such as luxury homes and cars. By contrast, cultural capital (measured by high levels of education and particularly education in the arts and humanities) disposed its holders toward conspicuous displays of learning and refined taste.<sup>40</sup> Bourdieu's mapping of the distribution of "capitals" led him to identify a division of between managers and business-oriented professionals on one side, and professionals in the culture industries (academe, media, the arts) and the public and non-profit sectors on the other. We find some evidence of this division in American society, not only in consumption patterns but in political views. But we also find that some views Bourdieu associated with economic capital—such as orientation to economic status signals—influence many more people in the stratum than he suggests. Similarly, some views he associated with cultural capital—particularly the cosmopolitan interest in other cultures—have taken on a more defining role within the stratum than he seems to suggest.<sup>41</sup>

### Time-Use Indicators

Time use studies show, in broad strokes, the distinctive interplay of self-discipline and self-expression in the professional-managerial stratum. The data presented in table 19.1 show that highly educated people worked longer hours on average than



TABLE 19.1 American's Use of Time, 1985

BACKGROUND FACTOR	Biological		Status			Role		Parenthood		Temporal		Ecological		
	Sex	Age	Race	Educ.	Income	Occupation	Work Hours	Marital Status	P18	P5	Season	Day of Week	Urban or Rural	Region
<i>Contracted Time</i>														
Work	-	++	0	+	+	+	+++	0	0	-	0	---	0	+
Work Related Travel	-	++	0	+	+	0	+++	+	0	-	0	---	-	+
<i>Committed Time</i>														
House Work	+++	+++	-	-	0	0	---	+++	++	+	0	+	+	0
Child Care	+++	-	0	0+	0	0	---	+++	+++	0	0	-	0	0
Shopping	++	0	-	+	0	0	---	+	0	0	0	0	0	-
<i>Personal Time</i>														
Sleep	0	0	0	-	0	-	---	0	0	0	0	+++	0	0
Meals	-	++	-	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0	+	0	+
Groom	+	0	+	-	0	0	0	-	0	-	+	+	0	0

BACKGROUND FACTOR	Biological		Status			Role		Parenthood		Temporal		Ecological		
	Sex	Age	Race	Educ.	Income	Occupation	Work Hours	Marital Status	P18	P5	Season	Day of Week	Urban or Rural	Region
<i>Free Time</i>														
Education	0	---	0	+	0	0	---	---	-	-	-	-	0	-
Religion	+	++	++	0	-	0	-	0	0	0	-	+++	+	+
Organization	0	++	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	+	+	0
Cultural activities	0	---	-	++	+	0	0	0	0	0	+	++	0	0
Visiting	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0	+++	0	0
Sports	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0	+	++	+	0
Hobbies	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	0	0	0	+	0	-
Communication	+	0	0	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	0	+	0	-
TV	-	0+	++	---	-	-	-	0	-	0	0	+	0	-
Read	0	++	-	++	0	0	-	0	-	-	++	+	-	+
Stereo	0	0	+	-	-	0	0	-	0	-	++	0	0	0
Total free	0	+	0	0	-	-	---	-	-	0	+++	0	0	-
Travel	-	-	0	++	++	+	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	-

Source: Robinson and Godbey (1997), p. 190.

Note: Symbols in this table should be interpreted as follows: Zero (0) means no significant relationship. One symbol (+ or -) represents correlation coefficients ranging from .05-.09; two symbols represent correlation coefficients ranging from .10-.19; three symbols represent correlation coefficients ranging from .20-.29; four symbols represent correlation coefficients above .30. Signs (+ or -) represent the direction of the correlation.

TABLE 1923. Americans' Use of Time, 2001

BACKGROUND FACTOR	Biological			Status			Role			Temporal			Ecological		
	Sex	Age	Race	Educ.	College	Income	Occupation	Work Hours	Marital Status	Household		Season	Day of Week	Urban or Rural	Region
										PI8	FS				
	Female	Older	Black	College	High	Prof	High	Married	Yes	Yes	Summer	Weekend	Urban	South	
<i>Contracted Time</i>															
Work	-	-	0	++	++	++	+++	+	0	0	0	0	-	0	0
Work Related Travel	-	-	0	+	+	+	+++	+	0	0	0	0	-	+	0
<i>Committed Time</i>															
House Work	++	++	-	0	0	0	-	++	-	0	0	+	+	0	0
Child Care	++	-	0	+	+	0	0	++	++	+++	0	0	0	0	0
Shopping	++	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0	0
<i>Personal Time</i>															
Sleep	0	0	+	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	0	++	++	0	0
Meals	-	++	-	++	0	0	0	++	-	0	0	+	+	0	0
Groom	++	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Free Time</i>															
Education	0	-	0	-	0	0	0	-	+	-	-	-	-	0	0
Religion	0	+	0	0	-	0	-	0	0	0	0	++	0	0	0
Organization	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+
Cultural activities	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	++	0	0	0
Visiting	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sports	-	0	-	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0
Hobbies	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	-	0	0	0	0	0
Communication	0	-	0	0	0	0	-	-	0	0	0	++	0	0	+
TV	-	++	++	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	+	+	0	0
Read	0	+++	0	+	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	+	0	0	0
Stereo	-	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total free	0	++	+	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	+	0	0	0	0
Travel	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0

Source: American Time Use Survey (2001)

Note: Symbols in this table should be interpreted as follows: Zero (0) means no significant relationship. One symbol (+ or -) represents correlation coefficients ranging from .05-.29; two symbols represent correlation coefficients ranging from .30-.49; three symbols represent correlation coefficients ranging from .50-.69; four symbols represent correlation coefficients above .70. Signs (+ or -) represent the direction of the correlation.

others in both 1985 and 2005, but they also spent more time on child care and in volunteering. They engaged in more physical exercise. They spent more time reading than others, and they attended more (though not many more) arts events. They were able to expend time on these projects of self-improvement and social improvement because on average they slept less, relaxed less, and watched less television. Education was a better predictor of time use in each of these spheres than was either income or occupation. Professionals' investments in culture and community organizations were less evident in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century than in the mid-1980s, while their differential investments in work remained highly significant. Professionals continued to sacrifice sleep and television for longer work hours.

We can improve on the broad class comparisons time use data provide by filling in with more detailed studies. No single source of data exists to provide the range of information necessary for this purpose. Our portrait, like a mosaic, has been constructed from small bits of information built up, piece by piece, into a coherent whole. The single best source of data is the cumulative General Social Survey. Data on topics not covered by the GSS are drawn from a variety of sources, including the U.S. census of 2000, the American Time-Use Survey, the Consumer Expenditure Survey, specialized reports on arts and reading participation, and market reports from the financial services and travel and tourism industries. We also draw on many other specialized studies. As we report the findings of these studies, we interpret all percentage estimates of differences among groups using confidence intervals.<sup>42</sup> When we use the terms *more likely* and *less likely*, we mean to denote statistically significant differences, net of other covariates in the analyses.

### Spheres of Self-Discipline and "Self-Denial"

We find high levels of self-discipline and "self-denial" in the realms of life that are most closely connected to career, community life, and the intergenerational reproduction of social status. These are areas in which restraint and visible effort are most highly prized.

### KEEPING PACE: WORK AND WORK INTENSITY

In *Time for Life*, sociologists John Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey conclude, "While college-educated people may live in better homes, drive fancier cars, or wear designer clothes, they do not have more free time; indeed having abundant free time is not a badge of honor. Today's privileged class of college graduates does not have the privilege of free time."<sup>43</sup> Professionals and managers spend more time at work during the average day than other workers and are significantly more likely to say that they work more than 40 hour weeks.<sup>44</sup>

(This is far more true of men; women said they spent many fewer hours working.<sup>45</sup>) College education, high income, and professional and managerial occupations are all related to longer work hours.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless these are mainly nine-to-five workers, perhaps adding a few hours in the evenings and on the weekends when deadlines are pending. Only those with the strongest ambitions and greatest responsibilities try to keep up with the pace of top executives with breakfast meetings at seven and business-related socializing after work.

Some observers believe that the work of professionals is more intense and stress-filled than that of other workers because of deadlines, multitasking requirements, and lack of supervision. On average, however, the work of industrial workers and technicians is at least equally demanding, and it lacks many of the attributes of professional work that attenuate stress. Social scientists find that work stress is a function of time pressures, accountability pressures, and consumer-demand pressures. Professionals and managers do not face the automatic time pressures of the assembly line, but they do often have targets that they must meet by deadlines.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the proportion of professional and managerial workers regularly facing tight deadlines has been growing over time.<sup>48</sup> Those in human services (for example, teaching, social work, and health care) may spend three-fourths or more of their time in the company of clients, another characteristic of work environments associated with stress.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, professionals typically enjoy the advantages of greater autonomy (or control of work flow and time), which attenuate pressures that come from tight deadlines and work with clients.<sup>50</sup>

Self-discipline is closely linked to opportunities for self-fulfillment. When the GSS last asked the question in the mid-1990s, 80 percent of professionals and managers said that having a "fulfilling" job was very important to them; the reported importance of having these kinds of jobs rose with educational level.<sup>51</sup> Professionals can realize the goal of fulfilling work more often than other workers because they are more frequently employed in jobs designed with high levels of flexibility. These jobs combine high levels of multitasking, discretion, capacity to use intellectual abilities, and unregulated coordination with others.<sup>52</sup> They are most likely to be found in industries, such as finance and research, that produce complex products or involve complex work processes.<sup>53</sup> More generally, professionals and managers are connected to multiple sources of information in their work lives, and it is now common to see the busiest among them working on several screens at once on their computers or checking for information on their smart phones as they wait for meetings to start. The job designs of professionals and managers are more engaging and therefore more fulfilling, because they create more interesting and varied work, even if they periodically demand high levels of work intensity.



Popular resentments of professionals derive, at least in part, from the perception that professional work involves a play element that leads to self-actualization, while people like themselves are forced to engage in a meaningless grind of repetitive actions and encounters. These images can be easily exaggerated. Outside of the creative elite, the play element in professional work would be more accurately defined as choice among limited options. Professionals sort through a constrained set of alternatives, using their training and whatever seasoning they have gained from experience, to inform choices on a limited range of recurrent problems.

#### THE ABLE BODY: FITNESS AND HEALTH

The capacity to work hard and live fully requires good health. Regular, vigorous exercise also demands self-discipline. The elite of the industrial age expressed their status through physical solidity and even corpulence, but the elites of our health-conscious age express their status through physical vigor and youthful appearance. Indeed, fitness has been a major theme among professionals since the 1980s, when the popularity of jogging, health clubs, and health foods boomed.<sup>54</sup> The pursuit of youthful vitality through physical exercise is now a widely held norm throughout the upper classes.

Less than one-quarter of American adults engage in vigorous enough physical activity every week to achieve health-related benefits; some estimates run as low as 15 percent.<sup>55</sup> Net of covariates, higher levels of both education and income are significantly associated with regular physical exercise. Reports of physically unhealthy days or time lost from work due to poor health are less common too among high-income people and people with more education.<sup>56</sup> Some have speculated that education is primarily a source of information about the benefits of regular exercise, whereas income is primarily a source of the economic opportunities to participate in physical activities through memberships in tennis, golf, and health clubs.<sup>57</sup> Social status is not the only influence on physical fitness. Older people, women, and minorities exercise less than younger people, men, and whites.<sup>58</sup> They are also more likely to be among the 30 percent of Americans who are completely sedentary.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, age, gender, and minority status also influence self-reports of physically unhealthy days and time lost from work due to poor health.<sup>60</sup>

#### SERVICE TO OTHERS (AND SELF): COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING

In the professional-managerial stratum, the old adage "to serve is to rule" does not quite apply. Here to serve is to express moral virtue. This is another arena requiring self-discipline, because every hour of service is an hour taken away from work or leisure. Among professionals and managers who

volunteer, efficiency and competence continue to be prized, but they are joined by requirements to show that one is concerned with more than one's own life or narrow social circle. Almost 30 percent of Americans say they volunteer in community organizations, and those who volunteer say they average about an hour of service a week.<sup>61</sup> Few such small investments in time are as important to social acceptability.

Volunteering is strongly related to education. More than twice as many college graduates (46 percent) as high school graduates (21 percent) say they volunteer.<sup>62</sup> Professionals working in the public and nonprofit sectors are more likely than others to volunteer in community organizations.<sup>63</sup> Highly educated people are also much more likely to hold leadership positions in voluntary organizations.<sup>64</sup> They are more likely to tutor and teach, to coach or supervise sports, and to provide counseling and medical care. They are particularly active in youth service and educational organizations as compared to less educated and older adults who favor involvement in church activities.<sup>65</sup> Church attendance and participation is a less important way to express moral virtue for highly educated professionals and managers than it is for less educated and lower-income workers.<sup>66</sup>

Most who engage in volunteering say they do it for idealistic reasons.<sup>67</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to think of volunteering as entirely a matter of self-denying service to others. Volunteering also satisfies social interests in making friends and developing organizational skills. It can be a precondition for acceptance in higher social circles because it provides both the symbolic capital—the assurance of moral concern and contribution to the collective good—that cements friendships with other community leaders and the admiration of those who are less involved.<sup>68</sup>

#### ORGANIZATION AND EDUCATION KIDS: STATUS TRANSMISSION

The journalist David Brooks coined the term *organization kid* to describe children of the professional-managerial stratum distinguished by the flurry of activities that mark their days: school and study, sports and music after school, tutoring others for effective community service, and religious activities for spiritual development.<sup>69</sup> Like their adult counterparts, these children are "fully scheduled." In Brooks's words, "Elite kids are likely to spend their afternoons and weekends shifting from one skill-enhancing activity to the next."<sup>70</sup> Behind the rise of the organization kid, Brooks suggests, lies the increasing competitive demands for being accepted to the "right" universities and the values parents attach to socialization for leadership in the organizational world that children will inhabit as adults.

An ethnographic study by the sociologist Annette Lareau showed that middle-class parents tend to conform to a logic of child rearing she characterizes as "concerted cultivation":

They enroll their children in numerous age-specific organized activities that dominate family life and create enormous labor, particularly for mothers. The parents view these activities as transmitting important life skills to children. . . . This "cultivation" approach results in a wider range of experiences for children but also creates a frenetic pace for parents, a cult of individualism within the family, and an emphasis on children's performance.<sup>71</sup>

Middle-class parents often "were preoccupied with the pleasures and challenges of their work lives." They viewed childhood as a "dual opportunity": a chance both to play and to develop talents and skills of value later in life. One parent noted that playing soccer taught his son to be "hard nosed" and "competitive," skills that would be valuable in the workplace. Another noted the value of activities for learning to work with others.<sup>72</sup>

Quantitative studies using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics show that a mother's education exhibits a very strong positive effect on the hours per week her children spend in organized leisure activities and on the mean number of activities in which her children participate.<sup>73</sup> Another study using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey (kindergarten cohort) showed strong effects of both parents' education and family income on children's likelihood of participating in arts and crafts groups, performing arts groups, and sports clubs and of taking educational trips with their parents.<sup>74</sup>

This evidence on organizational involvements should not lead us to overlook the central importance of education itself as an element connecting professionals' life experiences with their strategies for intergenerational transmission of status. Professionals have relied on their educational qualifications, and, without businesses to hand down to their children, they naturally see education as an essential means for the reproduction of family social status. Professionals also tend to have the skills and information to help their children succeed in school. Drawing on a sample of couples from the National Survey of Families and Households, William Marsiglio found that both the father's and the mother's educational attainment were important net influences on the amount of time parents were engaged with preschool children. (The father's education was an important net influence on the amount of time he spent talking with and reading to his older children.)<sup>75</sup> Similarly, for a sample of California children aged three to ten, Suzanne M. Bianchi and John P. Robinson found that children of parents with bachelor's or advanced degrees read more and watched less television than the children of less educated parents. They also spent more time studying than the children of less educated parents.<sup>76</sup> Children growing up in the home of highly educated adults hear at least three times as many words in the average day as children growing up in the home of high school dropouts.<sup>77</sup>

## Spheres of Self-Expression and Pleasure Seeking

Professionals and managers seek self-expression and pleasure in the realm of consumption. Owing largely to their higher levels of education, they express outlooks that are relatively cosmopolitan and tolerant of cultural and political differences. They are also comparatively likely (although not very likely) to cultivate pleasures of the mind.

### THE PRESTIGE-ACQUISITION STYLE AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

Decades ago, the sociologist Michael Sobel identified four lifestyle patterns in the population at large. He called the dominant consumption pattern among affluent Americans the "prestige acquisition" lifestyle.<sup>78</sup> He found high to very high ratios of factor loadings to standard errors for the following consumer goods: housing expenditures, vacations, club memberships, reading material, dress clothing, household decorations, and furniture. While all three SES variables (income, occupation, and education) were strongly connected to this prestige-acquisition lifestyle, Sobel observed that the lifestyle was most strongly related to high income.

More recent consumer-expenditure data from the mid-2000s confirm that income is the strongest influence on the purchase of the consumer goods and services that go into a prestige-acquisition lifestyle. The highly educated consume about 1.5 times their share of discretionary goods and services. Professionals and managers also consume about 1.5 times their share of discretionary goods and services. But people in households earning \$100,000 or more annually consume much more than that—about 2.5 times more than their share of the population. Those in households earning \$150,000 or more annually consume nearly three times their population share—and in some expenditure areas (such as second homes, fees and admissions, and specialized apparel) much more than three times their share. Education is connected to the acquisition of information, but income is, not surprisingly, more closely connected to the acquisition of expensive objects. We can assume that high-earning medical specialists, corporate lawyers, successful architects, and investment consultants participate just as actively in the prestige-acquisition lifestyle as do business executives (see table 19.2).

Professionals and managers rate the importance of financial security highly: When the GSS last asked about the importance of financial security, 80 percent of professionals and managers said that it was "very important." As the sociologist Michele Lamont found, "signals of high socio-economic status are the only status signals that are really significant" for many upper-middle class men.<sup>79</sup> These interests in financial security continue a long tradition. As Burton Bledstein observed, "Historically, the middle class in America has defined itself in terms of three characteristics: acquired ability, social prestige, and a

TABLE 19.3 Shares of Aggregate Expenditures on "Luxury Items" by Education, Occupation, and Income of Heads of Households, 2003

Expenditure	Masters or Higher Degree	Professional or Managerial Occupation	Income > \$100k	Income > 150k
<i>Percentage of Population</i>	10.2	24.9	12.8	4.4
<i>Annual Expenditure Share</i>	15.7	34.9	27.9	21.9
<i>Share Disproportion</i>	1.6x	1.4x	2.2x	2.7x
Food Away from Home	15.5	35.3	29.0	11.6
Alcohol	16.0	35.9	28.7	12.8
Housing	16.0	34.5	26.3	11.3
Second Homes/ Other Lodging	24.6	43.2	44.2	24.3
Property Tax	20.0	37.6	31.9	14.7
Furniture	19.3	40.5	38.0	17.3
Floor Coverings	32.5	40.5	40.0	25.4
Misc. Household Equipment	17.8	38.2	34.7	15.1
Household Services	24.0	40.4	36.2	18.6
Other Personal Services	16.9	42.8	33.7	15.7
Vehicles	10.7	32.8	26.9	10.8
Men's Apparel	16.3	35.8	34.9	15.3
Women's Apparel	14.1	34.9	31.1	12.1
Other Apparel Products/ Services	20.0	42.0	36.3	19.3
Fees and Admissions	24.5	44.5	38.7	18.8
Other Entertainment (e.g. equipment, supplies)	15.5	39.2	29.1	14.1
Reading Materials	22.7	38.6	28.6	11.8
Education	26.0	46.5	39.9	21.1
Pension/Insurance	19.5	44.0	39.1	17.1
Cash Contributions (e.g. charity, gifts)	24.6	37.4	37.1	21.8

Source: Bureau of Labor and Statistics ("Consumer Expenditure Survey") 2005.

[comfortable] life style.<sup>80</sup> Yet professionals and managers, like other Americans, do not wish to be seen as materialistic. Only 20 percent of professionals and managers told the GSS in the mid-1990s that "having nice things" was "very important" to them.

Nor do all who desire the prestige-acquisition lifestyle have the resources to attain it. Instead, the opportunities are a byproduct of economic success, higher-than-average saving during early and middle adulthood, or inheritance. Consumer tastes consequently vary with age and income. The young are more interested in squeezing meager resources to make stylish statements. Those with lower incomes may continue the hipster or casual style of their

college years. Others look to the purchase of solid and durable goods that Bourdieu associated with the need to "make a virtue of necessity" among the lower-middle and working classes. In an age of reduced prospects and reduced salaries, making a virtue of necessity has become more important to lower-income professionals, and the prestige acquisition lifestyle, however desirable, seems out of reach to many.

#### THE (COMPARATIVELY) OPEN MIND: TOLERANCE AND COSMOPOLITANISM

The value of freedom of expression can be seen in the extent to which the prerogative is accorded to others. The association between higher education and tolerance for unpopular views is one of the most consistent findings in social science. The first systematic study of support for civil liberties, by the sociologist Samuel Stouffer, found that college graduates were more much likely than others to tolerate unpopular opinions in the name of free speech and to be interested in protecting the civil rights and civil liberties of minorities.<sup>81</sup> These findings have been replicated in many studies over the last half century.<sup>82</sup> Within the professional-managerial stratum, somewhat higher levels of tolerance and support for civil liberties have been associated with employment in the public and nonprofit sectors.<sup>83</sup> Demographic variables, such as youth, urbanism, and low levels of religiosity, are also strongly related to tolerance and support for civil liberties.<sup>84</sup>

Cosmopolitanism, or interest in cultures outside one's own, is the active complement to passive support for the civil liberties of others. The highly educated are far more knowledgeable than the less educated about societies beyond the borders of the United States.<sup>85</sup> They also show greater willingness to explore other cultures. Foreign travel is a measure of cosmopolitan consumption patterns. About one out of nine adult Americans travel abroad during the year. Professionals and managers constitute two-thirds of foreign travelers. No doubt this disproportionate share of foreign travel partly reflects the higher incomes of professionals and managers. (The median household income of foreign travelers was nearly \$100,000.) But the propensity to visit foreign lands likely also reflects the cosmopolitan interests of the highly educated. A recent study showed that professionals constitute the largest proportion of pleasure travelers to foreign countries, nearly four times their share of the adult population.<sup>86</sup> Other measures of cosmopolitanism reveal similar patterns. The World Values Survey asked respondents to identify to which of geographic group they belonged "first of all." Some 15 percent of respondents cited a supranational entity (the world or a continent); those most likely to do so were people living in large urban places (21 percent), having the highest education (18 percent), and born in the most recent cohort (21 percent).<sup>87</sup> Conversely, local and subnational regional identities were most common

among people living in villages and among the least educated and the oldest cohorts.

#### THE CREATIVE CLASS?

Participation in the arts and cultural activities is not widespread in American society, nor does it take up much time for most people—much less than an hour every month on average.<sup>88</sup> Within the context of this meager diet, education is a strong predictor of participation.<sup>89</sup> For example, in the early 1990s, 77 percent of adults with postgraduate degrees attended at least one arts event during the year, compared with similar attendance by less than 10 percent of those without a high school diploma. Income also predicted arts participation, but it was not as important as education.<sup>90</sup> Other studies have shown a significant net association between professionals and highbrow artistic tastes,<sup>91</sup> and some have found that teachers, professors, and arts and communications professionals are particularly likely to say they enjoy classical music and to attend theatrical productions and art exhibitions.<sup>92</sup>

Reading is more common than arts participation, taking up more than half an hour a day among those with higher degrees.<sup>93</sup> Educated people are much more likely to be readers and to read “serious” literature. Male college graduates read about twice as much as male high school graduates each day. (Among women educational differences in reading are lower.) People in professional and managerial occupations are more likely to read literature than those in blue-collar and service occupations, even after education, income, and demographic characteristics are taken into account.<sup>94</sup> Reading largely takes the place of television watching. College graduates watch about one-third less television each day than less educated people—the difference between two and three hours a day on average. Yet even college graduates spend, on average, three times as many minutes per day watching television as they do reading.<sup>95</sup>

These data suggest that professionals and managers in the United States do not generally focus on esoteric cultural knowledge as important expressions of their status in society. According to GSS data from the mid-1990s (the last time the question was asked), one-third of professionals in culture industries and nearly the same proportion of professionals in human services cited “being cultivated” as a “very important” characteristic in friends. By contrast, fewer than 10 percent of science and engineering professionals and fewer than 20 percent of managers rated “being cultivated” as a very important characteristic in friends.<sup>96</sup> These findings were consistent with the higher than average, but nevertheless limited, appeal of creativity as a quality in friends.<sup>97</sup> In the same data series, professionals involved in human services and cultural industries were the only professional groups to report even one-third of the time that creativity was a “very important” characteristic in friends. Scientists,

engineers, and managers were very unlikely to think of creativity as a very important quality.<sup>98</sup>

#### Professional-Managerial Culture and the Ethos of Global Capitalism

We have shown that some foundations of middle-class respectability have remained impressively constant since the birth of the modern professional stratum in the late nineteenth century: notably, comparatively long hours at work, the high value placed on financial security, and the expression of status through prestige acquisitions. But middle-class respectability has also evolved in ways that parallel the evolution of broader American cultural expectations and anxieties. Thriving in the professional-managerial stratum today requires new forms of self-discipline—including higher average levels of physical fitness, which has become a status symbol, and close attention to the organizational activities of children. Where community volunteering was once the special province of women, in an age of dual careers it has become expected of upper-middle class men as well. The horizon of members of the stratum has gradually expanded. Cosmopolitan tastes, once characteristic of city life, have become far more common in the suburbs.

Given their superior access to status-related information, it would be surprising if highly educated professionals and managers were less connected to the emerging trends in global capitalist culture than people in less connected social strata. In fact, the developing ethos of educated elites in the United States shows a close correspondence to what we might call the “competitive cosmopolitanism” of global capitalist society.

Economic competition is accepted and embraced by highly educated professionals and managers, no less than by business elites. Political scientist Pippa Norris’s study of the World Values Survey indicated that highly educated, urbanized people living in economically developed democracies were the strongest supporters of free trade and free movement of labor, the cornerstones of neoliberal policies. Educated elites in other countries were also interested in competitiveness and efficiency, if only because they hoped to see their national industries succeed in a world economy strongly influenced by market priorities.<sup>99</sup> As Andrew Hacker has written:

The abilities and outlooks associated with the analytical style (of the highly educated) can no longer be adequately thought of as “white” or “Western” or “European,” but are in fact part of a dominant global culture, which stresses not only literacy and numerical skills, but also administrative efficiency and economic competitiveness.<sup>100</sup>

At the same time, the freer movement of capital, labor, and tourists across national boundaries encourages tolerance and cosmopolitanism, characteristics



not often associated with earlier eras of European and American capitalism. Professionals' interest in the arts and literature and other cultures points the way toward the more cosmopolitan and interconnected world culture of the future and is shaped, in turn, by the gradual emergence of that culture. The indicators of cultural expansion and hybridization are already pervasive in the largest and most cosmopolitan cities and in institutions with ambitions for global leadership. The range of national influences on Western pop and rock music has grown to include reggae from the Caribbean, South American samba and bossa nova, bhangra from India, and rai from Algeria. Fusion food has become the standard fare in upscale restaurants in urban centers. At the leading universities in the world, such as the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, the École Polytechnique, Columbia University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as many as 20 to 25 percent or more of students come from foreign countries.<sup>10</sup> No doubt cultural pluralism of this type appeals more to young, urban, and secular professionals than to others in the professional-managerial stratum. They are the leading edge of change.

The new "great powers" rivalry between the United States and China could lead to policies of economic and social retrenchment—and the regionalization of trade and cultural ties. If global integration continues, however, competition and cosmopolitanism will go hand in hand.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it will be difficult for American industries to capture new global markets without a complementary broadening of cultural appreciation and sensitivity. To the extent that globalization advances, we are therefore likely to be impressed with the degree to which the culture of professionals and managers in twenty-first-century America is consistent with, and influenced by, the culture of global capitalism—efficient and expansive; profit-oriented, yet tinged with environmental and social consciousness; and diffusing Western organizational techniques while incorporating the diversity of the human population out of which new markets are formed.

## Notes

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3. Larson, *Rise of Professionalism*, 66–79.

4. Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: Norton, 1976), 246.
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17. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Personal Savings Rate* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2006).
18. *Ibid.*
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46. College-educated people overestimate their work hours on surveys by as much as two to three hours per week on average. William A. Sundstrom, "The Overworked American, or the Overestimated Work Week? Trend and Bias in Recent Estimates of Weekly Work Hours in the United States" (unpublished paper, Department of Economics, Santa Clara University, 1999); Harley Frazis and Jay Stewart, "What Can Time Use Data Tell Us about Hours of Work?" *Monthly Labor Review* 127 (December 2004): 3-9. This overestimation of work hours may be partly due to the lack of clear boundaries between work and nonwork for many professionals, especially those who work part of the time at home. Over-reporting increases with the number of hours reported. Workers who reported working sixty hours or more on surveys are found to work about fifty-three hours per week when diaries are used instead. John P. Robinson and Ann Bostrom, "The Overestimated Workweek? What Time Diary Measures Suggest," *Monthly Labor Review* 117 (August 1994): 11-23; see also Sundstrom, "Overworked American."
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## Thrift in the Other America

Wilson Brissett

The idea that there exist "two Americas"—divided by a vast gap in economic opportunity—has a long history in American politics, stretching back to the populism of William Jennings Bryan and reviving as recently as John Edwards's two failed bids for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004 and 2008. The concept was crystallized for the late twentieth century, however, by Michael Harrington in his 1962 book *The Other America*. His argument is directly aimed at the persistence of poverty in the midst of widespread affluence in the United States of the postwar period. In a chapter near the end, titled "The Two Nations," Harrington offers a forceful account of the income inequality divide in America:

The United States in the sixties contains an affluent society within its borders. Millions and tens of millions enjoy the highest standard of life the world has ever known. This blessing is mixed. It is built upon a peculiarly distorted economy, one that often proliferates pseudo-needs rather than satisfying human needs. For some, it has resulted in a sense of spiritual emptiness, of alienation. Yet a man would be a fool to prefer hunger to satiety, and the material gains at least open up the possibility of a rich and full existence.

At the same time, the United States contains an underdeveloped nation, a culture of poverty. Its inhabitants do not suffer the extreme privation of the peasants of Asia or the tribesmen of Africa, yet the mechanism of their misery is similar. They are beyond history, sunk in a paralyzing, maiming routine.<sup>1</sup>

Harrington argues that American poverty is an entrenched, cultural phenomenon and that it silences the political voices of those who are trapped within it. This claim locates the problem of poverty on the grandest of moral scales—the