5

Social Class, Neighborhoods, and Romantic Relationships

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INTRODUCTION

We all know the formula for a good romantic comedy movie – couple meets, conflict tears couple apart, couple resolves conflict and ends up together. Aside from the fact that the vast majority of those couples are heterosexual and White, there is another common characteristic of the couples – they are usually upper middle-class professionals. The main characters almost always live in amazing apartments in the best parts of big cities and have exciting jobs with seemingly unlimited flexibility in work hours. Dates often take place in expensive restaurants or venues (e.g., cultural events like the opera or sporting events with great seats). Weddings are grand, in beautiful locations with catered gourmet food and decorations. If there is a divorce, neither character ever mentions financial issues related to the breakup – they miraculously end up with a new fabulous, fully furnished apartment. If we only learned about romantic relationships from these movies, we might believe that those in lower socioeconomic classes do not experience romance. Not only does Hollywood typically ignore the role of social class in romantic relationships, the overwhelming majority of empirical studies on intimate relationships also ignores the role of social class and place in how we experience our romantic relationships. Obviously, we know romantic relationships are not simply experienced by the middle-class and those with wealth. But, how does social class influence the development, maintenance, and dissolution of intimate relationships? This chapter will focus on four stages of romantic relationships (dating, cohabitation, marriage, and divorce) and the role of social class (i.e., income and education) and place (i.e., neighborhood characteristics) in each stage. In terms of the literature review, I restrict my focus to the past fifteen years (i.e., since 2007).

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MONEY AND THE DATING GAME

In US society, dating is not cheap; often a date entails going out for a meal and/or drink and seeing a movie – not to mention gas for the car or paying for a taxi or carshare ride. In fact, in 2019, the average date night in the United States was estimated at around $116 – ranging from $143 in San Francisco to $83 in Omaha (Watson, 2019). Moreover, dating has generally followed a heteronormative expectation of the male (or the individual who requested the date) to pay for any expenses related to the date (e.g., Lever et al., 2015). So, how does socioeconomic status impact how individuals initiate and begin a romantic relationship?

First and foremost, where do individuals find their dating partners? Traditionally, research has suggested that one of the strongest predictors of attraction and relationship initiation is proximity (Sprecher, 1998). Thus, it makes sense that individuals would find their dating partners from the same neighborhoods, schools, or workplaces they occupy (Couch & Koeninger, 2016). Yet, some interesting research from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a nationally representative study of 14–17-year-old students in the United States during the 1994–1995 academic year, throws this idea into question. Grieger et al. (2014) argued that in addition to peer groups, the larger schools and neighborhood environments can shape the norms and rules around risky sexual behaviors, and as such it is important to understand whether adolescents tend to find their romantic partners within their school or neighborhood. In preliminary descriptive analyses, they found that around half of students in this study (47 percent female, 51 percent male) found a romantic partner from their school or neighborhood. What is striking is that half of the students found their romantic partner *outside* of their neighborhood or school, but it is not known whether this means that they are crossing social class boundaries or simply finding partners from other similarly situated neighborhoods and schools. Moving away from adolescents to adults, a recent review of socioeconomic status and intimate relationships (Karney, 2021) argues that there is evidence to support the idea that place and SES matter in relationship formation. Specifically, Karney reviews research that finds low-SES couples are more likely to meet in public, shared spaces, which serves to "exacerbate their disadvantages," whereas higher-SES couples are more likely to meet in selective and private spaces, which serve to "consolidate their advantages."

With the emergence of online dating apps, this mode of relationship formation has begun to supplant traditional offline ways of meeting potential romantic partners discussed in Karney's review – and possibly making place less important. Rosenfeld et al. (2019) found in a 2017 nationally representative survey of US adults that almost 40 percent of heterosexual adults reported meeting their partner online. Although most online dating apps are free at a basic level (e.g., Bumble, Tinder, Match.com), they all offer a premium version

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with upgrades (e.g., unlimited swipes, see who likes you before you swipe, better filtering) for a price. Some researchers have sought to understand whether there are social class differences in who accesses online dating. Valkenburg and Peter (2007) found that neither income nor education significantly predicted frequency of visiting dating apps or posting profiles among a sample of Dutch adults. But, Sautter and colleagues (2010) argue that it is more appropriate to frame the discussion around the "digital divide." Specifically, studies failing to show income and education as significant predictors of online dating behavior usually test this idea among those with access to the internet. Instead, they argue and find in their research that income and education predict access to the internet, but once internet access is controlled for, these social class factors no longer predict online dating behavior. Although access to smartphones and the internet has expanded significantly in the past decade, the digital divide continues, especially in rural America. Furthermore, when examining access to broadband (defined as download speeds of at least 25 megabytes per second [Mbps] and upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps), which is now considered essential for reliable and rapid access to the internet, approximately 45 percent of US households making less than $30,000 per year do not have broadband (Winslow, 2019). Thus, it is clear that in the current environment, social class can impact one's ability to participate in online dating apps as a means of relationship formation.

Another way of viewing the role of social class and dating is by examining dating partner preferences. Almost forty years ago, Buss and Barnes (1986) famously examined human dating preferences, replicating a common finding that women more so than men "*preferred mates who showed good earning potential and who were college educated*" (p. 569). As dating apps have emerged, the thought is that this preference would replicate online. In a study of a Chinese dating app, Ong and Wang (2015) constructed fake dating profiles and found that males of various income levels visited females' profiles without focus on their income level, whereas females of all income levels were more likely to visit higher-income males' profiles – in fact, males' profiles with the highest income level received ten times more visits than the lowest income level. In another study, Ong (2016) found a similar pattern for education – such that it does not appear to matter for females' profiles but does for males' profiles. Similarly, in a US sample, Hitsch and colleagues (2010) found that women preferred income over physical attributes more than men. However, more recent research conducted in Canada with female participants found that although income was influential in both short-term and long-term online dating preferences, it was a weaker predictor than physical attractiveness. Moreover, physical appearance acted as an initial filter, such that income was considered after screening for the most physically attractive profiles (Woloszyn et al., 2020). Thus, the literature remains equivocal about whether social class matters for dating preferences in the online world of dating.

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When examining the literature on social class and specific dating behaviors, much of it tends to focus primarily on adolescents and college students (e.g., Allison & Risman, 2014; Bartoli & Clark, 2006; Brimeyer & Smith, 2012; Owen et al., 2010; Sprecher & Regan, 2002). In a paper using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Meier and Allen (2009) found that social class plays a role in the type of romantic relationships US adolescents experience; specifically, low-SES adolescents in the study were less likely to experience a steady exclusive dating relationship, but more likely to have sexual intercourse in their most recent relationship (Meier & Allen, 2009). In another paper by Meier and Allen (2008), social class differences were found for sexual experiences but not for those who said they had a "*special romantic relationship*" (self-defined by participants). In other words, they argue that social class (e.g., family background and income) impacts both the "*nature and timing of adolescent and young adult intimate relationship*" (p. 30).

A number of studies have examined other sexual behaviors common in dating relationships. Several studies have found that those from lower SES groups are less likely to engage in hookups (Allison & Risman, 2014; Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009; Owen et al., 2010). On the other hand, Brimeyer and Smith (2012) found that social class was neither predictive of number of dates nor hookups in a college sample. Similarly, Manning et al. (2005) found that, among adolescents, family income was not related to hooking up. However, when examining other risky sex behaviors, researchers have found that lower family income is related to increased casual sex and unplanned pregnancy for adolescents (e.g., Miller et al., 2001), and low SES is a significant risk factor for unintended pregnancy among adult women (e.g., Iseyemi et al., 2017). Furthermore, although beyond the scope of this chapter, there is a robust literature examining the role of social class on condom use and sexually transmitted diseases, which suggests that lower SES individuals (especially adolescents and certain race/ethnic groups) are more likely to engage in risky sex behaviors (see Harding, 2007, for a review).

Aside from sexual behaviors in dating, another common focus in the literature is on social class and dating violence. Dating violence is widespread and present in all social classes, with approximately 30 percent of adolescents reporting experience with dating violence (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Although some research has not found a link between SES and dating violence victimization or perpetration (e.g., Lavoie et al., 2002), other research has shown a link between low-SES and increased dating violence among adolescents and college students (e.g., Pflieger & Vazsonyi, 2006). Pflieger and Vazsonyi (2006) further found that low self-esteem mediated the association between poor parenting and dating violence behaviors (both victimization and perpetration) for low-SES adolescents, whereas for high-SES adolescents it only mediated between poor parenting and dating violence beliefs.

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To conclude, the dating game is not free from social class influences. An individual's socioeconomic status has been shown to impact who an individual prefers to date, where and how one meets, and what individuals do in terms of dating behaviors. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on whether these social class influences extend to dating among LGBTQ individuals, although it is not unreasonable to assume that many of these results will generalize. In other words, money influences our initial attraction and interactions with potential romantic partners. Even though the first stage of intimate relationships is tied to one's social class, does social class continue to exert an influence as a relationship moves to the next stage of commitment?

MY PLACE OR YOURS OR NO PLACE

As a relationship develops into a more serious commitment, cohabitation becomes a common consideration. Viewed from a middle-class lens, this often takes the form of one individual moving into the other's place or finding a new place together. However, for individuals with less means, their options for cohabitation may be more constrained. Alternately, cohabitation may be broached earlier in some couples as a means of saving money.

Cohabitation (or living together) has changed dramatically in the past few decades. Once seen as going against social norms (particularly religious mores; see The LeClair Affair in 1968 at Barnard College), couples today are more likely to cohabitate prior to or in place of marrying than twenty years ago. In the United States, cohabitation in the past two decades among unmarried couples has nearly tripled from 6 million to 17 million (US Census Bureau, 2019) and that number is even more striking when compared to 1980 when there were only 1.6 million cohabiting couples in the United States (Spanier, 1983). In terms of demographic differences, the most recent US Census report (2019) finds most cohabiting individuals are fairly equally split between young adults (18–34 years old; 48.5 percent) and middle adults (35–64 years old; 45.5 percent), two-thirds are White (67 percent) with Hispanics (16 percent) and Blacks (11 percent) accounting for a roughly quarter combined. With respect to education, a shift has occurred over the prior twenty years with individuals cohabiting in 2017 being more highly educated (59 percent with at least some college) than in 1996 (43 percent with at least some college). However, with respect to income, although there has been a decline in the past two decades, those making less than $30,000 per year still make up the majority of cohabiting individuals (63.8 percent in 1996 vs. 52.7 percent in 2017). Moreover, support for cohabitation among high school seniors has almost doubled since the mid-1970s (from 40 percent to 71 percent; Anderson, 2016). Approximately 60 percent of young women (particularly Whites as opposed to Blacks) expect to cohabit with a partner before marrying (Manning et al., 2014). And, having

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a baby is no longer seen as a motivating reason to get married among young adults (Sassler et al., 2009).

But, why do couples choose to cohabit, and could this be related to social class? Some couples cohabit to "test the waters" of compatibility before moving onto marriage, whereas other couples may cohabit out of financial necessity. Sassler and Miller (2011) found that couples with lower-SES may be quicker to cohabit in order to pool their financial resources as a way to improve their economic security. Sassler and colleagues (2016) similarly found that men and women with lower-SES were more likely to move rapidly to cohabitation than their counterparts with higher-SES. Through living together, individuals can reduce food costs, improve housing quality, and have a ready source of emotional support (Edin et al., 2004; Sassler & Miller, 2017). Additionally, cohabiting can greatly decrease the expenses associated with dating.

Although cohabitation is often mentioned as a precursor to marriage, that is not necessarily borne out in the literature. Indeed, cohabiting is increasingly viewed as an alternative form of union (Guzzo, 2020). When examining through the lens of social class, those in lower SES groups are less likely to move from cohabitation to marriage. Specifically, those without a college education who are cohabiting are significantly less likely to get engaged or marry than those with a college education who are cohabiting (Sassler et al., 2018). As Karney (2021) so succinctly states: "*For those who complete college, escalating commitments take time but proceed steadily from sex to cohabitation to marriage and, finally, to first parenthood. For those without a college education, sex happens quickly after meeting, cohabitation soon after that, and first parenthood is mostly likely to precede marriage, if marriage happens at all*" (p. 398).

As gay marriage has only been legal in the United States since 2015, cohabitation has been the traditional form of union for same-sex couples. As a result, research on cohabitation and social class for same-sex couples is virtually nonexistent. I located one recent study that examined the sociodemographic differences between same-sex cohabiting and married couples using the Current Population Survey from 2015/2016 and 2017/2018. Manning and Payne (2021) found that almost half of same-sex couples were married (45 percent), but that cohabitating versus married same-sex couples differed on several important characteristics. Similar to different-sex couples, cohabiting same-sex couples were less likely to have children, were younger, more mobile, more likely to rent their home, and, most relevant to this chapter, earned less income than their married counterparts.

Prior research has suggested that cohabiting relationships are less stable and committed compared to marriages (see Wagner & Weiss, 2006, for a review), which led to oft repeated claims in academia and popular media that living together was connected to higher divorce rates and was bad for society in general (e.g., Focus on the Family (Morse, 2001) – *The Problem with Living*

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Together; Morgan's (2000) book – *Marriage Lite: The Rise of Cohabitation and Its Consequences;* New York Times Opinion (Jay, 2012) – *The Downside of Cohabiting before Marriage*). However, more recent research has debunked this idea (Kuperberg, 2019), with some research showing that increased cohabitation is actually likely to lead to more discriminant selection into marriage, which would lead to declining or stabilizing divorce rates (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014). Other research has shown that once observed (e.g., age, education, religiosity) and unobserved selection effects are controlled for cohabitation is actually related to lower risk of divorce (Kulu & Boyle, 2010; Kuperberg, 2019). Still, others note that the direction of effect may be reversed such that divorce leads to increased cohabitation due to second unions and changing norms, expectations, and attitudes (e.g., Perelli-Harris et al., 2017). However, there are social class differences in this research as well. Cohabiting couples with lower-SES appear to be at greater risk of relationship dissolution than cohabiting couples with higher-SES because they move in together much quicker (e.g., Kuperberg, 2019; Sassler et al., 2018).

Although cohabitation is becoming a common form of union for many young couples across the social class spectrum, research has consistently shown that couples with less income and education are quicker to make the jump to living together for economic reasons and with less intent to move towards marriage. And, this faster trajectory towards cohabitation is related to greater likelihood for relationship dissolution.

MARRIAGE OF EQUALS?

As we see from the above discussion, the child's rhyme of "first comes love, then comes marriage…" is less accurate today than in the past. However, most individuals do end up marrying at least once in their lifetime. In the United States, 50.4 percent of adults eighteen years or older live with a spouse (US Census Bureau, 2021). Aside from the common reason of love, there are many reasons couples marry including companionship, children, and financial considerations (Horowitz et al., 2019). Regardless of the reason, marriage is the merger of two independent individuals into a dyad. In this dyad, each individual brings to the relationship their own contribution and expectation of the other's contribution.

Today, we often hear the phrase a "marriage of equals." The literature on assortative mating backs up this phrase showing that individuals match up based on both education and income, and assortative mating has increased substantially since 1960 (Greenwood et al., 2014; Schwartz & Mare, 2005). More importantly, this assortative mating has been linked with increased income inequality in the United States (Greenwood et al., 2014; Schwartz, 2010). In other words, homogamy is deepening and solidifying the income divide in America.

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But, what happens when two people enter a marriage from different socioeconomic backgrounds (i.e., heterogamy)? Theory and prior research suggest that those from different backgrounds have different cultural experiences and values (Hanel et al., 2018); thus, heterogamous couples (regardless of the domain) are likely to experience more conflict and less stability due to the cultural differences in experience and values (e.g., Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008). Specifically, symbolic interactionism states that the salient advantage for homogamous couples is that their "stock of experience" is organized similarly (Berger & Kellner, 1970).

Much of the research on heterogamy focuses on those from different ethnic (e.g., Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008) or religious backgrounds (e.g., McClendon, 2016), or different ages (e.g., Pyke & Adams, 2010). With respect to social class heterogamy, many of the studies are conducted in European countries. In one study examining educational heterogamy in twenty-nine European countries, there was no connection between educational heterogamy and self-assessed health (Huijts et al., 2010). Another study conducted in Finland found educational heterogamy was related to greater likelihood of cohabitation (Mäenpää & Jalovaara, 2014). Finally, a study of Dutch parents found that educational heterogamy was related to cultural differences in childrearing (Eeckhaut et al., 2014).

With respect to income heterogamy, given the persistent gender wage gap in the United States with women making eighty-two cents on the dollar to men (Payscale, 2022), dual-earner heterosexual couples are unlikely to be equal in terms of income contributions to the household. A marriage of unequals (particularly in regards to income) is most likely to impact division of household labor. There is strong evidence that a wife's relative income contribution affects division of household labor, with those contributing less than their husbands doing more of the housework and childcare (e.g., see Gupta, 2006, for a review). This finding would lead us to believe that income homogamy would lead to an equitable division of household labor. However, there is an interesting reversal when a wife's income contribution matches or exceeds her husband's contribution. Specifically, wives whose incomes are the same or more than their husband's actually do more housework and childcare (Bittman et al., 2003; Schneider, 2011; Syrda, 2022). This result is likely due to gender role norm violations leading couples to try to reinforce them within the area of household labor – referred to in the literature as "gender deviance neutralization" (e.g., Syrda, 2022).

But, what about same-sex couples? Prior research has shown that same-sex couples are more likely to be heterogamous than different-sex couples on a number of sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, education, age), but not on income for example, (Manning et al., 2016; Schwartz & Graf, 2009). Yet, do differences in income contribution dictate division of household labor for same-sex couples? Although only a few studies have examined

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this idea, they have consistently shown that proportion of income does not translate into a greater or lesser share of housework for same-sex couples (Civettini, 2016; Solomon et al., 2005). Instead, Civettini (2016) found that housework division was related to non-normative gender displays, such that femininity for gay men and masculinity for lesbians was predictive of housework division. Moreover, Civettini (2015) and Downing and Goldberg (2011) found support for time availability, such that greater paid work hours was predictive of a smaller share of the housework for same-sex couples, which is similar to findings for different-sex couples (e.g., Cunningham, 2007).

To conclude, homogamy is a double-edged sword. Assortative mating strongly suggests that those with similar social and cultural backgrounds are most likely to marry and these marriages are more successful than those that are heterogamous. However, homogamy (especially in social class) has been shown to maintain, if not widen, the income inequality in society. Yet, heterogamy is increasing as interracial/interethnic and mixed religion coupling is becoming more commonplace in society. Moreover, with the gender pay gap, heterosexual couples (but not same-sex couples) are likely to be somewhat heterogamous with respect to income. We see from the literature that heterosexual individuals with different incomes navigate a marriage by trying to maintain gender role norms and expectations. In other words, increasing equality in income leads to a more equitable division of household labor but only to a point; once the woman makes the same or more than the man that benefit disappears and she ends up doing more housework to neutralize the gender role deviance. Interestingly, the impact of relative resources does not seem to impact same-sex couples' division of housework; rather inequity in housework for same-sex couples is more likely to be related to time availability (i.e., paid work hours) and non-normative gender displays.

TOO POOR TO DIVORCE

What does the research tell us about the link between socioeconomic status and divorce? According to the United States Census Bureau, both the rate of marriage and divorce declined in the United States from 2009 to 2019 (Anderson & Scherer, 2020). In other words, even though fewer people are marrying, fewer are also divorcing. When these numbers are broken down by income level, based on the 2019 American Community Survey, we see that divorce rates drop from a high of around 45 percent among those in poverty (i.e., making less than $10,000 annually) to a low of around 30 percent for those making $200,000 or more annually (Yau, 2021). Moreover, as suggested in the prior section, inequality in income within heterosexual couples – specifically if wives make more than their husbands – is linked with higher divorce rates. According to Nock (2001), wives who are equal contributors (i.e., 40 percent – 59 percent) in terms of family earnings are less committed (defined

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as viewing separation/divorce being associated with an improvement in various areas of life) and more likely to initiate divorce. As has been suggested in prior research, whereas men benefit from the marital status, women typically only benefit from marriage if it is high quality (Nock, 2001; Sayer & Bianchi, 2000). Researchers have proposed that the increased divorce initiation among women who are equal contributors is partially due to their increased sensitivity to the quality of the marriage; because they have more power within the relationship than women with less income, they are able to leave a low-quality marriage (Nock, 2001).

The conclusion that many researchers and laypeople espouse with regard to the higher divorce rates among individuals with lower SES is that they are less skilled at marriage or value marriage less (e.g., Small et al., 2010) than individuals with higher SES. However, Trail and Karney (2012) showed in their study of income and marriage that these assumptions are wrong. Specifically, in a sample of US individuals, they found that those with lower incomes endorse similar or more traditional values compared to those with higher incomes – especially with respect to divorce. Furthermore, they reported similar or slightly lower expectations for marriage than those with higher incomes. Finally, in terms of relationship problems, the two income groups did not differ with respect to communication, sex, parenting, household chores, or in-laws; however, those with lower incomes did report more problems with money, substance use, fidelity, and friends. Thus, it is not that lower income groups value marriage less, have unrealistic expectations, or are less skilled, but, rather, that they are more likely to encounter economic and social issue difficulties related to their income level (Trail & Karney, 2012). Relatedly, other research has shown that couples with lower income are more likely to cite "instrumental" reasons for dissolution or divorce such as substance abuse, domestic violence, and lack of contribution to the household, whereas couples with higher income cite more relationship-oriented reasons such as problems with communication, incompatibility, lack of intimacy or personality differences (see Karney, 2021, for a review). These issues are not unique to different-sex couples; indeed, prior research suggests that the correlates of relationship dissolution/divorce are the same for same-sex couples, including relationship dissatisfaction, lack of commitment, being young or partner age gaps, discrepancy in income or low income, and low education (Farr & Goldberg, 2019).

Fifty years ago, many women stayed in low quality marriages because their economic situation did not allow for them to divorce and divorce laws around the United States punished women financially (Leopold, 2018). This situation has changed dramatically over the decades, with more advantageous divorce laws (e.g., moving away from alimony in favor of shared assets; no-fault or unilateral divorce laws vs. fault divorce laws requiring proof of wrongdoing, such as cruelty, adultery, or desertion) and the increasing numbers of dual-income couples making it easier both legally and financially to divorce (Nock, 2001).

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However, this typically assumes a middle class or upper middle-class social status. Even though individuals in higher SES groups do not suffer the same financial loss as those in lower SES groups, other research has shown that, regardless of social class, divorce is predictive of drops in wealth and financial security – especially for women (Hogendoorn et al., 2020). But, what about later financial recovery following divorce? Here social inequity continues to have an impact. Specifically, as reviewed by Karney (2021), those who are college educated and have higher SES are more likely to remarry and rebound financially than those who are less educated and have lower SES. In other words, the social divide continues to grow even after divorce and remarriage.

GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The literature reviewed in this chapter also highlights several gaps and future directions. First, the vast majority of the existing research on social class and romantic relationships is on heterosexual couples. We know next to nothing about how social class may impact LGBTQ relationships. Although there is no reason to expect that social class would have a different impact on these relationships, it is likely that sexual orientation and social class may intersect and produce multiplicative effects on initiation, maintenance, and/or dissolution. Future research is needed on the intertwining role of sexual orientation and social class during relationship formation and development.

Another gap is that a substantial portion of the literature on several of the topics discussed in this chapter is conducted in European or Asian countries as opposed to the United States. Although Western Europe and the United States share similar cultural orientations, Asian countries have a more collectivist perspective, which may lead to different results with respect to the social class and romantic relationships. A focus on family and community over the individual may buffer people from the effects of low SES on romantic relationships. Cross-cultural research is desperately needed to provide a more nuanced understanding of the intersection of culture and class on romantic relationships.

Relatedly, even within the United States, place is rarely considered in research on romantic relationships. When I speak of place, I am not only referring to urbanicity but also geographic region. In fact, often urbanicity and region are interconnected in our lexicon – when we think of the American Midwest it is usually referring to suburban neighborhoods, whereas the Northeast is often synonymous with urban centers, and the South is interchangeable with rural. Researchers have argued that different cultural norms and values emerge based on place (Van de Vliert, 2007). For example, Shifrer and Sutton (2014) found region and urbanicity differences in locus of control. They found that adolescents from the rural South were less likely to have an internal locus of control, whereas urban and rural adolescents from the

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Northeast were more likely to have an internal locus of control. Furthermore, they argued that these differences might be due to cultural differences between these two regions. Finally, their results appeared to indicate that region was more strongly associated with differences in locus of control than urbanicity – specifically, the West and Northeast promote greater internal locus of control than the Midwest and South. Prior research has established a link between locus of control and relationship satisfaction, such that those with an internal locus of control report greater sexual satisfaction (Asgharianji et al., 2015) and marital satisfaction (Lee & McKinnish, 2019).

But, how would this relate to social class and romantic relationships? Social class and place are often confounded. Consider the inner city, which is disproportionately lower income and minority-identifying versus the suburbs, which are middle-class and overwhelmingly White. Sociologists have long argued that neighborhood and place are intimately tied to culture, and we know that culture shapes norms and values, which feed directly into our social organization and, ultimately, our social interactions – including our intimate relationships. Harding and Hepburn (2014) argue in their review of the cultural mechanisms on neighborhood effects for the importance of understanding "*how to characterize the cultural context of disadvantaged neighborhoods and how being embedded in such contexts affects individuals*" (p. 22). In other words, even though research on place and romantic relationships is still emerging; future studies are needed to separate the influence of urbanicity from region and culture from neighborhood.

Finally, it goes without saying that race/ethnicity and social class are often interconnected in American society. The disadvantaged are disproportionately from Black and Hispanic race/ethnic groups. Although there is quite a bit of research on race/ethnicity and romantic relationships (see Chapter 2 in this book), it would be beneficial to examine whether the race/ethnic differences in marriage and divorce are due primarily to social class differences or cultural differences or some other contributing factor.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the literature from the past fifteen years on social class and the different stages of romantic relationships from meeting a potential partner, to cohabitation, marriage, and divorce. Although by no means an exhaustive review of the literature, three recurring themes are present in each stage. First, the "*rich get richer and the poor get poorer*" is apparent even within intimate relationships. Specifically, we see that those with less financial means are likely to meet and marry those from a similar social background, which widens the income divide. Even following divorce, those who are better off financially are more likely to remarry and emerge as financially sound as before, if not better. Second, gender differences in romantic relationships

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persist regardless of social class (albeit likely exacerbated by SES). In other words, women are still the main caretakers in heterosexual relationships, and the influence of gender norms on initiation, paying, and housework are still pervasive across the socioeconomic spectrum. Rich or poor – women still do the majority of relationship care and household labor. Third, and most important, relationship expectations are not influenced by social class. As shown in prior research, most individuals regardless of SES expect to fall in love, get married, and start a family. Stated differently, money cannot buy love – but it can make it easier to date, marry, and divorce.

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