12-13-2023

Affluence and Interpersonal Trust

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by

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Under the Direction of Erin Ruel, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of the Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2023

ABSTRACT

This study explores the interplay between affluence and interpersonal trust in the United States. While existing research often focuses on the impoverished, this investigation shifts the lens to the affluent, shedding light on how affluence affects interpersonal trust dynamics.

Using qualitative methods, we conducted 15 in-depth interviews with affluent individuals and their family members. Three key findings emerged:

Trust Discrepancy: Participants claimed to trust others, but their behaviors suggested hesitancy in trust-dependent activities like sharing secrets or loaning money.

Affluent Upbringing and Lower Trust: Those raised in affluent households reported lower trust levels compared to others.

Reluctance to Discuss Finances: Affluent individuals hesitated to discuss financial matters within their families, possibly linked to economic inequality implications.

In summary, affluence appears to negatively impact interpersonal trust, extending beyond personal relationships to societal consequences. This research informs discussions on income inequality by shifting the focus to the accountability of the affluent and offers insights into the affluent's experiences and behaviors. Understanding these dynamics can guide policies and interventions toward a more equitable and trusting society.

INDEX WORDS: Interpersonal, Trust, Wealth, Affluence, Culture, Inequality

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December 2023

DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to the Steven and Gerry Ann Tosone Fund for Income Inequality Research $^{\text{not TM}}$. Their unflappable support was invaluable to the completion of this project. Steven and Gerry Ann have dedicated a great deal of time and consideration to impressing upon myself the importance of scholarship, empathy, and gratitude. This research has made me even more grateful than I thought possible for their unwavering love and support.

I hope to make them as proud of me as I am of them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many who have worked to make this project possible, as well to build my skillset and inspire me to create research that strives to contribute to the greater good.

I must first thank Dr. Erin Ruel, without whom this project would not have happened. She encouraged me to craft a thesis that would help develop my skills as a sociologist, as well as demonstrate my desire to contribute to the field of income inequality research. Her guidance gave me the courage and capability to attempt and complete a complex and lengthy research process, in the face of many personal and professional hurdles. Her kind, consistent, and honest advice and feedback made me a better sociologist, researcher, and human being. She has my eternal gratitude.

Drs Heying Jenny Zhan and Deirdre Oakley have both patiently and passionately contributed feedback that shaped, matured, and added essential nuance to this project.

Finally, without the foundational sociological and anthropological education provided by Drs Yvonne Newsome and Douglas Falen during my time at Agnes Scott College I would be nowhere. They created the sociologist in me, and every professional success of mine, past, present, and future, is also their success.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 1989 the world was shocked by the gruesome murders of wealthy Hollywood executive José Menendez and his wife, Kitty, by their two sons, Erik and Lyle. Just 18 and 21, respectively, Erik and Lyle eventually admitted to the murders, having shot their parents at least a dozen times. Two trials ensued in which the brothers initially claimed that “the mob” had committed the crime. After their confessions, the brothers claimed that José had been molesting the boys since early adolescence, and that José was violently abusive (Rand 2018).

The media frenzy surrounding the murders exposed the lavish and impulsive spending habits of the young men. Tracking expenditures that added up to at least half a million dollars in the weeks following the murders, the media reported purchases by Lyle including a sports car, a designer watch, and a restaurant, while Erik used his recent inheritance to fund his burgeoning tennis career and investments in rock concerts. These spending sprees fueled the public’s suspicions about the young men and their roles in their parents’ murders. Initial sympathy for the “boys”, as their attorneys referred to them, dissipated into antipathy and horror as their guilt and the financial nature of their motive came to light (Rand 2018). If these two attractive, sociable, privileged young men could brutally murder their parents for unfettered access to their money, what does that say about the nature of the closest relationships among wealthy people? If money can motivate children to gruesomely take their own parents’ lives, how can wealthy people trust anyone?

In the years since the Menendez murders, income and wealth inequality has expanded (Domhoff 2013; Horowitz et al. 2020). The growing problem of income and wealth inequality was a major topic of consideration in the 2016 and 2020 US presidential elections, with multiple candidates running on platforms of more progressive taxation and expanded social programs

(Boak 2016; Lauter 2015). Justifying increased public interest, the increase in economic inequality in the US has laid bare the problems of wealth concentration, including poorer mental and physical health outcomes for the lower- and even middle-classes (Behrens and Grob 2016; Blau and Blau 1982; Christ and Fleming 2012; Coburn 2000; Krieger et al. 1993; Krueger et al. 2016; Pickett and Pearl 2001).

Additionally, wealthy people have influence over our government and experts have begun to question the strength of our democracy (Domhoff 2011; Heaney 2006; Muller 1988; Powell and Grimmer 2016). Furthermore, increasing privatization of industries and the economy as a whole mean that more decisions that impact society are being made by the wealthy instead of elected representatives (Coburn 2000; Domhoff 2013; Gilens 2012; Massey 1990; Powell and Grimmer 2016; Spilerman 2000). As wealthy people become richer and more powerful, we must seek to understand their thoughts and behaviors the same way we have sought to understand those of the impoverished. Who are these people who have influence over some of the biggest decisions for our country and the world?

The topic of income inequality is typically sociologically analyzed by focusing on the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of the impoverished (Bank 2016; Blau and Blau 1982; Bradley and Cole 2002; DiBiase and Miller 2015; Pickett and Pearl 2001). I argue that this trend in the research reflects the attitude deeply and uniquely embedded in the culture of the United States that those in poverty are responsible for their situation or are responsible for remedying it. The broader idea that individualism, entrepreneurship, and hard work can lift anyone in the U.S. out of poverty via the golden road of opportunity has been a key component in the continued ignorance about the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of those most affluent and powerful. Focused studies of the lives of the affluent may open the door to a better understanding of the way the U.S. and other global economic super-powers are governed and operated. More specifically, this thesis is intended to contribute to a growing body of research asking important questions about wealthy people, shifting the sociological discourse from one focused solely on the responsibility of the impoverished to one that includes and analyzes wealthy people, as well.

There exists a handful of qualitative studies about the lives of the affluent (Domhoff 1974; Harrington 2016; O'Neill and Affluence Project 1997; Sherwood 2012). Among their primary and agreed upon findings are that affluent people have intricate and close-knit social networks scaffolded by overlapping positions in financial organizations, corporations, school boards, and luxury amenity providers like country clubs. These studies also find that affluent people are plagued by concerns, their own and those of others, regarding the distribution of their estates upon their deaths. Finally, these studies agree that trust in personal relationships is hard to come by and of great concern to the affluent. The recurrence of this theme led me to ask, "How does affluence affect interpersonal trust?"

By conducting individual interviews with affluent people in the United States about their experiences with interpersonal trust, I discovered new information about the how the affluent navigate relationships when trust is difficult to ascertain. By asking similar and specific questions about interpersonal trust of a subset of affluent people, I obtained information necessary to indicate a relationship between affluence and interpersonal trust, as well as to guide future research.

Furthermore, canonical sociological studies have found that trust is integral to socialization, happiness, and even morality (Durkheim 1897; Marx 1867). It is this connection between interpersonal trust, socialization, and morality that has led me to argue that understanding how affluence affects interpersonal trust is germane to the economic future of the world. If the affluent, who dominate global politics (Coburn 2000; Domhoff 2013; Gilens 2012; Massey 1990; Powell and Grimmer 2016; Spilerman 2000), are morally compromised as a result of stunted socialization, isolation, and anomie, we should work to understand if and how this psycho-sociological phenomenon affects those subject to their power.

Findings from this study indicate that affluence negatively impacts interpersonal trust. The affluent are reluctant to engage in behaviors that require trust like loaning money or sharing secrets. Additionally, being raised in affluence leads to suspicion of the intentions of others and skepticism about the sincerity of their closest relationships. Finally, an overarching reluctance to discuss finances or money with family and friends indicates reticence to trust others and, possibly, concern about the potential implications of open discussions that would involve addressing economic inequality among families.

With this research, I have added to the field of stratification and the social psychological field of interpersonal trust. I accrued important information about the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of the affluent. A better understanding of those orchestrating and benefitting from economic inequality is crucial to amelioration of this growing problem. Helping to change the conversation about income inequality from one about the accountability of the impoverished to one about the accountability of the wealthy, this research contributes to a necessary shift in focus while furthering our understanding of the experiences of the wealthy and helping to guide future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Research indicates that affluent people struggle to develop interpersonal trust, even in their closest relationships. Many affluent subjects admit that they mistrust even those closest to them due to concern that others may be motivated to engage in relationships by benefits from proximity to their wealth, rather than by sincere affection or genuine interest (Harrington 2016; Ho 2009; O'Neill and Affluence Project 1997; Sherwood 2012). The discussion of family wealth, including everything from how long breadwinners will support various family members to how estates are distributed, creates questions about who is to be trusted (Domhoff 1974; Harrington 2016; Ho 2009; O'Neill and Affluence Project 1997; Sherwood 2012). This theme in the literature has led me to ask, "How does affluence affect interpersonal trust among breadwinners and their families?"

2.2 Defining Wealth, Net Worth, and Affluence

For the context of this study, it is important to understand the difference between income, wealth, and affluence. While data about income, or money earned from work or investments, is easy to gather and analyze, it is recognized that it does not properly assess the wealth of the richest among us (Bloome and Furey 2019; Wolff and Zacharias 2007). Income inequality is an important measurement for understanding pay gaps, ensuring fair pay, and for understanding and ultimately preventing discrimination, but many of the wealthiest and most powerful among us have highly irregular or untraceable income. Further, many people who benefit from proximity to wealth have no earned income at all. Family and friends of the wealthiest Americans may have little or no income, but access to and influence over a great deal of wealth.

A common alternative, net worth, or the value of assets a person owns minus their liabilities, also fails to assess the economic well-being or lifestyle of a household (Wolff and Zacharias 2007). While measuring net worth or investable wealth may be a better measure of economic influence than income, it still fails to include those family and friends of the wealthiest among us who benefit from proximity to wealth. One very wealthy person may support not only their immediate family, but extended family and even friends.

The problem with measuring access to and influence over wealth via income or net worth has been identified and thoroughly analyzed by economists, particularly in the last two decades (Bloome and Furey 2019; Friedland, Moon, and Shirey 2002; Wolff 2017; Wolff and Zacharias 2007). Indeed, an analysis of measurement of household wealth and "economic well-being" from 2007 finds that, "Income and wealth, while positively correlated, are distributed rather differently among households. Wealth thus represents another dimension of well-being over and above income" (Wolff and Zacharias 2007: 85). Finding that wealth is a complicated and dynamic measurement to make, Wolff and Zacharias observe that those members of the wealthiest 1% of individuals in the United States who are currently earning income via employment are no wealthier or better-off than those earning income from other sources of revenue, like accrued value of assets (p. 83).

The sum of the findings made by researchers studying wealth measurement indicates that being affluent, or of the upper class, is more than a number. Rather, it is understood to be more complicated than absolute wealth or net worth, let alone income. Family members and friends of wealthy individuals are legitimate members of the upper class, living affluent lifestyles with many of the same problems and attitudes as breadwinners, often without any measurable income or net worth of their own (Domhoff 1974; Harrington 2016; O'Neill and Affluence Project 1997;

Sherwood 2012). For the purposes of understanding interpersonal relationships, it is more practical to measure how others perceive an individual's wealth or status than it is to find a dollar amount to describe a subject's net worth or annual income. A subject's perceived *class* is what directly affects their relationships. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I will use the term "affluence" to describe a wealthy person's class and status.

While previous studies frequently use the term "wealthy" to define members of the upper class they intend to study, the researchers typically did not have access to the personal financial details of their subjects. In contrast, the term "affluent" specifically refers to those who are wealthy *relative* to others in their area or group (Oxford Dictionaries 2019). Because relative wealth has proven to be a better measure of inclusion in the upper class than personal wealth in previous studies (Domhoff 2011; Harrington 2016; Sherwood 2012), "affluent" is the ideal descriptor for subjects of this study.

2.3 Interpersonal Trust

2.3.1 Defining and Measuring Interpersonal Trust

Sociologists and psychologists, alike, have been working to develop measurements of interpersonal trust, defined in John Rotter's early but seminal work, *A new scale for the measurement of trust*, as, "an expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon" (1967: 651). Here, and largely throughout the continuation of research regarding interpersonal trust, the nature of interpersonal trust lies in expected honesty. In his foundational scale, Rotter asks respondents about their perception regarding the honesty of parents, strangers, elected officials, peers, and themselves, reported as an additive result of a series of responses to Likert-scale styled prompts (p. 654). Rotter's initial study utilizing his scale finds that the most reliable indicator of a subject's perceived trustworthiness by others is their very own perception of their own trustworthiness, which will be included in the interview schedule (p. 663).

In 1980, a study seeking to operationalize interpersonal trust via a scale for the purposes of sociological study reaffirmed honesty as integral to the perception and maintenance of trust, but adds *benevolence*, or selfless motivation, with equal weight (Larzelere and Huston 1980). This study finds that key predictors of high levels of interpersonal trust include sincerity, selflessness, fairness, and reliability (p. 599). Authors Larzelere and Huston add that relationship status is another heavy predictor of trust, with newlyweds trusting each other more than separated couples, and long-married couples having more trust than anyone (p. 602).

Pushing further, a 1982 study created a scale designed to measure "specific" trust, or the trust of one individual in a specific other; in this case, a close loved one (Johnson-George and Swap 1982). Finding that perceived trustworthiness is a key predictor of perceived reliability and cooperation, this study inspired a host of research, spanning the last two decades, concerning the effects of trust in the workplace, specifically between co-workers, on efficiency and productivity (Abrams et al. 2003; Brown, Poole, and Rodgers 2004; Dirks 1999; Chia 2005; Matzler and Renzl 2006; Zaheer, McEvily, and Perrone 1998). The direction of research concerning interpersonal trust in the last few decades diverges between this new focus on interpersonal trust in the workplace and, more relevant to this study, the importance of trust in romantic and close, familial relationships.

2.3.2 The Importance of Interpersonal Trust in Love and Relationships

Researchers studying love and relationships over the last few decades sought to conceptualize love and to create a prototype of a loving relationships. Many studies asked subjects what components, emotions, or expectations shaped their view of the meaning of love or loving relationships. Many studies found that trust was either the most or one of the most desired attributes of a potential partner (Aron and Westbay 1996; Fehr 1988; Regan et al. 2000; Regan et al. 1998; Shaver et al. 1987). Additional studies found that higher levels of trust predicted the length of marriages and relationships (Larzelere and Huston 1980; Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna 1985). The results of these studies conclude that respondents feel that trust is central to their conception of love and the maintenance of long-term loving relationships.

A progression of studies analyzing what factors were most central or desirable in love and relationships find trust or trustworthiness at the top of the list, typically chosen over attributes like attractiveness, similarity of interests, and even feeling happy. This correlation is especially strong when asking specifically about characteristics of long-term relationships (Aron and Westbay 1996; Fehr 1988; Regan et al. 2000, 1998; Shaver et al. 1987). Trust was also found in several studies to be central to intimacy and even success of relationships (Larzelere and Huston 1980; Rempel et al. 1985).

2.4 Affluence and Interpersonal Trust

While studies of affluent culture touch on the importance of loyalty and trust among the affluent, they do not fully analyze the genesis or progression of their subjects' issues with trust. In 2016, Brooke Harrington, a wealth manager for the super-rich, used her professional proximity to the upper-class to attain data about their personal lives. She quotes one subject as saying, "People want to con them, scam them, rob them, kidnap them." Harrington elaborates: "These threats come not just from strangers but from their governments and even from their own families, further fueling suspicion on the part of clients that no one can be trusted" (p. 81). This is discussed in the context of Harrington explaining why trustworthiness is an essential characteristic for a wealth manager.

The idea that threats of cons, scams, and even kidnapping can come from one's own family clarifies the significance of trust issues among the affluent. How can one be fully integrated into society, and therefore capable of empathetic assessment, when every personal relationship is under scrutiny?

A 1997 study conducted by Jessie O'Neill, a psychologist, also mentions the severity and ubiquity of problems with interfamilial trust among the affluent:

> *Most of the affluent people whom I've interviewed and all whom I've treated professionally report that they have a difficult time trusting the motives of their significant others. In addition to an intense fear of abandonment, an affluent individual is never quite sure why anyone is interested in forming a relationship with them. (p. 97)*

O'Neill also observes that being the keeper of the coffers creates a power imbalance in romantic relationships: "Most people perceive money and power as synonymous, which bestows the possessor of the wealth the majority of the power in the relationship, frequently creating an unresolvable imbalance" (p. 41).

Harrington and O'Neill's studies highlight interfamilial trust as one of most prevalent and pressing issues in the personal lives of the affluent. However, the topic is mentioned in short sections and is given little consideration.

Each of these previous ethnographies report that affluent people struggle to identify whether personal connections are genuine or rooted in self-interest. Multiple studies go one step further, stating that subjects report not being sure whether or not any of their personal relationships are sincere, leading subjects to isolate themselves and mistrust those closest to them (Harrington 2016; O'Neill and Affluence Project 1997), it is my expectation that this social isolation and disillusionment results in what Durkheim calls "anomie", or the struggle to maintain a sense of self-identity and to understand and appreciate social norms, value systems, and, eventually, morality, affecting their ability to make moral decisions (Durkheim 1897; Durkheim and Simpson 1933).

2.5 Anomie and Morality

Durkheim's canonical study On Suicide determined four key types of self-harm, one of which he called "anomic suicide". In anomic suicide, one's goals and desires are unattainable, "condemn[ing] oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness" (p. 247). Durkheim concluded that this state, a state of having "an insatiable will", is a symptom of a society that fails to provide organic solidarity, or social bonds built via the interdependence created by the division of labor in modern societies characterized by high material density and secular morality (p. 247).

Durkheim felt that modern societies lack mechanical solidarity, or social bonds created via territorial, clan-based necessity. Without solidarity forced by both the need to survive and by intense religious morality, individuals would need a trusted social structure to provide moral guidance, typically in the form of a revered or admired government. In a modern society where mechanical solidarity is impossible, an absence of organic solidarity would lead a subset of individuals who cannot or will not participate or trust in social structures to experience anomie, or normlessness. In this state, without a social structure to provide sanctions, and therefore, moral guidance, an individual cannot know what is right and wrong and will begin to feel as though they either have no clear goals, or goals which are unattainable, leaving them perpetually disappointed and rudderless (Durkheim 1897; Durkheim and Simpson 1933; Hilbert 1989; Marks 1974).

While more modern theorists may debate the legitimacy of "normlessness" as a reasonable definition of anomie (Hilbert 1989; Marks 1974; Merton 1938), agreement exists that Durkheim intended anomie to describe a situation in which an individual's goals or expectations are unrealizable. Indeed, a mismatch between one's goals and abilities would, "condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness" (Durkheim 1897: 247). Following this more nuanced understanding of anomie, we see that one must be socialized to desire an achievement that is realizable. This socialization must occur as all socialization does, via the administration of sanctions. Furthermore, advocates of reframing Durkheim as someone who understood the role of broader social structures in creating and perpetuating unfillable desires amid a frenzy of capitalistic hedonism point out that Durkheim was clear in his supposition that individual interactions provide more meaningful sanctions, rooted in more concrete notions of morality than those provided by the structures that define structural functionalism (Durkheim 1897; Hilbert 1986, 1989).

In the absence of a social structure perceived to be just and trustworthy, an individual requires trusted relationships with others to provide meaningful sanctions, accountability, and, therefore, morality (Teymoori, Bastian, and Jetten 2017). Pew Research Center reports that Americans' trust in their government and each other is lacking, leading to general sentiment that broader social structures are untrustworthy in general (Raine, Keeter, Perrin 2019). In this absence of moral leadership, Americans must look to those closest to them for accountability and moral guidance (Durkheim 1897; Hilbert 1986). Therefore, if interpersonal trust is degraded among the affluent in this social-psychological context, Durkheim's theory of anomie tells us that the affluent are left without a moral rudder, normless and anomic. How would existing in this state affect policy making and cultural themes when the affluent are empowered to dictate both via their ownership of the media and their influence in politics?

2.6 Conclusion

Existing research concludes that trust is integral to the development and maintenance of personal relationships, social skills, and even morality. Qualitative analyses of the lives of the affluent consistently describe interpersonal trust as difficult to ascertain (Domhoff 1974; Harrington 2016; Ho 2009; O'Neill and Affluence Project 1997). Durkheim's research concludes that in the absence of both trustworthy interpersonal relationships and moral leadership, individuals are left rudderless, unaware of what is right and wrong in the context of their society's culture (Durkheim 1897; Durkheim and Simpson 1933; Hilbert 1986; Marks 1974). Therefore, if this research indicates that relationships of the affluent lack interpersonal trust, it will follow that the affluent may struggle to understand norms, values, and even morality. Without additional research exploring the nature of affluence and its effects on individuals, there will persist a gap in our knowledge about the nature and causes of inequality, allowing for the continued and unnecessary assignment of responsibility for inequality to the impoverished.

3 METHODS

3.1 Design

I conducted fifteen semi-structured in-depth interviews with 1-3 members of eight affluent families. As indicated in the literature, trust is a complex and difficult concept to study, so qualitative methods were necessary to assess the depth and nuance of this dynamic topic. Interviews were ideal as they allowed for rapport building, which was necessary to access in-depth and honest data from this insular population (Domhoff 1974; Harrington 2016; Mikecz 2012). Indeed, the findings indicate that rapport building was essential to discussing trust. Semi-structured interviews helped focus the interview on the concepts at hand (trust, affluence, and relationships), while allowing for respondent-driven revelations, which is important when studying topics with little preceding research to guide question formation and order, as well as when studying elites who, “do not like being put in the straight-jacket of close-ended questions” (Aberbach and Rockman 2002: 674; Harvey 2011; Mikecz 2012).

Interviewing multiple members of each family, (a breadwinner and either their partner or their child), helped to identify problematic or troubled relationships, and whether wealth ownership alone leads to problems with interpersonal trust. This method helped to pinpoint who exactly in affluent families struggle with trust and how that struggle manifests. Additionally, interviewing multiple family members helped indicate if and how the trust issues of breadwinners are similar or different from the trust issues of their family members.

3.2 Data

Data collection for this study took the form of 15 in-depth interviews. These interviews were conducted over the phone. I created audio recordings of the interviews and took notes before, during, and after the interview sessions. I used *Otter.ai* transcription software to convert the audio files of the interviews to text and then reviewed the transcriptions for errors, taking notes regarding initial impressions during this process. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, and the guide is attached (Appendix A). I gathered some additional data in the form of notes taken just before, during, and just after any interactions with subjects.

3.2.1 Population and Eligibility

I recruited 15 affluent individuals from eight families. It was the intention to interview one breadwinner and either a partner or a child of the breadwinner from each family. Three interviews with participants who were breadwinners failed to lead to an interview with another family member. Respondents were restricted to people currently living in the US to limit variations in data due to cultural differences (Harrington 2016). Respondents were required to be at least 20 years of age to maintain focus on adults with influence, access, and power and to avoid the complications that come with interviewing children.

As noted in the literature review, affluence is a better measure of eligibility for this study than income, net worth, or other measures of assets because non-breadwinners who may have no assets in their own name do have influence, access, and power via their relationships with breadwinners. As the focus of this study is the effect of interpersonal trust issues with the intention of guiding future research concerning how these issues affect the decision-making ability and even the morality of those in power, affluence is the best measure. Therefore, I define affluent as residing in a home valued at twice the value of the median home in the US ($400,000 x 2 = $800,000 minimum home value required for eligibility). Upon obtaining the address of the respondent during the recruitment process, I obtained home value estimates by submitting the addresses to three websites (Zillow.com, redfin.com, and realtor.com) and averaging the estimated values they returned.

3.2.2 Sampling

The exclusivity of the population of interest and its small size required qualitative methods, as it would have been difficult at best to acquire enough data for meaningful quantitative analysis. I accessed the population via my personal relationships with five potential subjects. To recruit subjects for interviews, I used the non-probability method of snowball sampling, which has been successfully utilized in previous qualitative studies of affluent people (Domhoff 1974; Harrington 2016; Ho 2009; Mikecz 2012). I initiated interview requests with five personal contacts of mine whom I know to be affluent, residing in the US, and over 20 years of age, meeting my only sampling parameters. These five interviews led to 13 other interviews (See Figure 1). I provided my contact information to all participants so they could ask other potential participants to initiate contact with me. I only conducted interviews with seven people known to the five seeds, and six of those participants' family members.

After 11 interviews, data collection stalled. I chose to begin distributing flyers (see Appendix B) to mailboxes of homes in the Atlanta metro area that met the sampling requirement. I searched the same three websites I used to verify participant qualification for homes that met the criteria for inclusion (Zillow.com, redfin.com, and realtor.com). I received one offer to participate in the study from someone who had received a flyer. I interviewed this person and his daughter, leaving me with a total of 15 interviews (during distribution I was able to secure two additional interviews via snowball sampling).

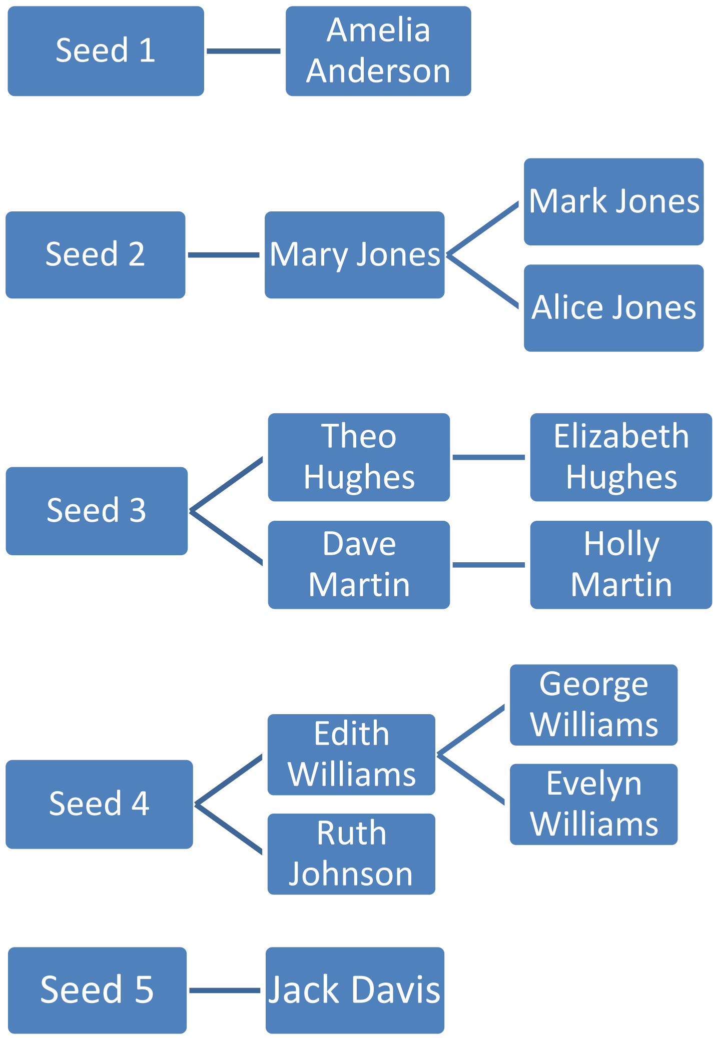


Figure 1: Snowball Sampling- Seeds and Participants

All names are pseudonyms. Participants from the same family share a surname in their pseudonyms.

3.2.3 Non-Response Bias and Self-Selection Bias

During data collection, it became apparent that potential subjects were reluctant to participate once told that the study was about affluence and trust. One potential seed I spoke with had initially expressed excitement about participating when told that I was looking for interviewees in a study about affluence. When I circled back with this seed to schedule the interview, he asked for more information about the topic, and I explained that I was studying, "affluence and trust," and he quickly said that he no longer had the time to participate. Another potential participant reached out and said they would love to be interviewed, but he didn't feel comfortable talking about money and, therefore, would not participate. In fact, at least six potential participants, including the one just mentioned, said they did not feel comfortable discussing money and would not participate. Several more participants withdrew their interest after asking for more information about the study and learning that trust was part of the study, like the first seed mentioned above.

This phenomenon indicates a limitation of this study, related to self-selection and non-response biases during the data collection process. It is justifiable to infer that potential participants who are self-aware about struggling to trust others would have been less likely to participate in this research than those who see themselves as trusting others easily. If, in fact, potential participants who are self-aware concerning their issues with interpersonal trust opted out of the study at a higher rate than those who see themselves as trusting people, it would indicate that my findings concerning the discrepancy between self-perceived willingness to trust and willingness to engage in trusting behaviors may have been overrepresented.

3.3 Constructs

The primary constructs of concern for this study are interpersonal trust and affluence. Findings of previous research that sought to define and explore the concept of trust indicate that interpersonal trust is best understood as the belief that another party is reliable, honest, and sincere.

I operationalized interpersonal trust with the questions, "What does trust mean to you," "How do you know whether you can trust someone or not," "What things can someone do when you meet them to earn your trust," and "What can someone do to erode your trust?"

Affluence was operationalized initially in the interview by asking the subject, “What do you think it means for someone to be affluent?” I also asked whether they feel they grew up affluent and if they consider themselves affluent now.

The interaction between the two primary constructs, interpersonal trust (variable) and affluence (constant), was investigated with prompts like, “Tell me about a time when you wondered if a person in your life was more interested in your money than your relationship,” “How comfortable are you sharing details about your finances with your family,” and “Overall, how has being affluent affected your willingness to trust others?”

3.4 Analysis

Finally, while grounded theory is often preferred for qualitative data analysis, I used thematic analytical approach as I felt it would be most useful in the context of this study, as I had a clear topic of focus: interpersonal trust. Thematic analysis was chosen for this study due to the focus on the theme of interpersonal trust, as well as the qualitative and inductive nature of this research, which is exploratory without clear expectations in regards to findings (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2011).

Thematic analysis provides the advantage of allowing both a focused research design with a definitive concept in mind and room for unanticipated insights. This is ideal for exploratory research with a focus on a particular concept (like interpersonal trust) (Daly 2007; Guest et al. 2011; Nowell et al. 2017). The key disadvantages of thematic analysis are the possibility for a lack of epistemological consistency and the tendency of researchers to neglect theoretical framework. In my analysis, I combat risk of epistemological inconsistency by clearly defining and operationalizing my concepts, while allowing these conceptualizations to evolve in the event of consistent, repeated undermining of my conceptualizations in the data, which did not occur. The importance and prominence of my Durkheimian theoretical framework should offset any risk of dilution or diminishing of the theoretical framework during analysis. The theoretical framework is clear, substantiated, and foundational to my research design (Daly 2007; Nowell et al. 2017).

I adhered to the six-step approach of thematic analysis as outlined in Braun and Clarke's *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology* (Braun and Clarke 2006):

First, I familiarized myself with the data by transcribing the audio files from the interviews into text via *Otter.ai* transcription software. I then listened to the audio files while reviewing the software-generated transcripts for errors. During this process, I became familiar with the data and prepared it for coding. After converting the audio of the interviews into text and typing up all notes, I began reviewing the data while coding. I used NVivo Release 1.7.1 to code and organize my data. I highlighted words and phrases and applied shorthand notation to indicate the topic, emotion, and/or focus of the highlighted portion. Then I collated the data according to the coding, allowing for further review.

Stage three entails grouping codes into themes based on patterns and selecting out the most relevant data. At this stage, the codes developed corresponded to themes that relate to the concepts of concern ("trust", "family", and "affluence"). In stage four, I reviewed the coded data and considered collapsing, expanding, nesting and other forms of additional categorization, while watching for additional themes or anything that was missed. In this stage it became clear that the data adhered to my own conceptualizations of trust and affluence. In stage five, I named and defined each theme identified in the previous stages. I began coding data into categories nested below "trust", "family", and "affluence". For instance, under "trust" I coded data into categories like "earning trust", "I'm distrusting", "I'm trusting", "losing trust", "who I trust", and "who I don’t trust”. Finally, in stage six, I wrote up the results of the thematic analysis, describing results and giving specific examples.

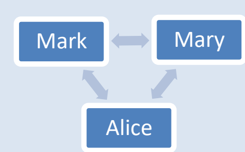
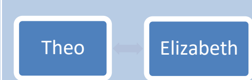
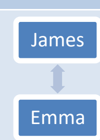
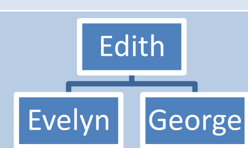
This process revealed that the subjects have experiences that have affected interpersonal trust, and that they have broader issues with interpersonal trust (discomfort sharing vulnerabilities with others, refusal to discuss finances with family, etc.). Therefore, I conclude that my expectation was correct that affluence affects interpersonal trust.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Research Sample: Demographic Information and Familial Relationships

As seen in Table 1, fifteen individuals from eight different families were interviewed, including two families of three, three families of two, and three individuals. Eight participants were breadwinners, and seven participants were their family members. Four families had homes valued in the $800,000- $1 million range, two families had primary residences valued in the $1 million to $2 million range, and two families had homes in the $2 million to $3 million range. Four families had primary residences in Georgia, one in Tennessee, one in Florida, one in Kansas, and one in New York.

Table 1: Sample and Families

Family Surname*	Home Value Range	Home Location	Breadwinner*	Family Member(s)*	Family Visualization*
Martin	$800,000- $1M	Georgia	Dave	Holly (Dave's Mother)	
Jones	$2M- $3M	Tennessee	Mark	1.Mary (Mark's Wife, Alice's Mother) 2.Alice (Mark and Mary's Daughter)	
Hughes	$1M-$2M	Kansas	Theo	Elizabeth (Theo's Wife)	
Randall	$2M-$3M	Georgia	James	Emma (James' Daughter)	
Williams	$1M-$2M	Florida	Edith	1. Evelyn (Edith's Daughter-in-Law,	

				George's sister-in-law) 2. George (Edith's son, Evelyn's Brother-in-law)	
Johnson	$800,000-$1M	Georgia	Ruth	No Family Interviewed	
Davis	$800,000-$1M	New York	Jack	No Family Interviewed	
Anderson	$800,000-$1M	Georgia	Amelia	No Family Interviewed	

* All names are pseudonyms. Participants from the same family share a surname in their pseudonyms.

All fifteen participants identified as white. As seen in Table 2, eight participants were the breadwinners of their families and seven were not. Five participants were between the ages of 30 and 40, two were between the ages of 50 and 60, two were between the ages of 60 and 70, and six were between the ages of 70 and 80. Nine participants were women and six were men. Eight participants reported growing up in a working-class household, four in middle-class households, and three in affluent households.

Table 2: Participants

Participant	Family Surname	Breadwinner	Age Range	Gender	Self-Reported Class of Upbringing
Dave	Martin	X	50-60	Man	Middle-class
Holly	Martin		70-80	Woman	Working-class
Mark	Jones	X	60-70	Man	Working-class
Mary	Jones		60-70	Woman	Working-class
Alice	Jones		30-40	Woman	Affluent
Theo	Hughes	X	70-80	Man	Middle-class
Elizabeth	Hughes		70-80	Woman	Working-class
James	Randall	X	70-80	Man	Middle-class
Emma	Randall		30-40	Woman	Affluent
Ruth	Johnson	X	70-80	Woman	Working-class
Jack	Davis	X	30-40	Man	Working-class
Amelia	Anderson	X	50-60	Woman	Working-class

Edith	Williams	X	70-80	Woman	Working-class
George	Williams		30-40	Man	Affluent
Evelyn	Williams		30-40	Woman	Middle-class

4.2 Trust, Distrust, and Upbringing

Table 3 illustrates who self-reported that they trust others easily and who self-reported that they are distrusting. Participants did not express a perception that affluence had affected their ability to trust others unless they had been raised in affluent households. In fact, each participant who self-reported having grown up in a working- or middle-class household, except for Dave, reported particular ease with trusting others. Only four participants (including Dave, who grew up middle-class) reported being distrustful of others. As seen in Table 3, the three participants who had been raised in affluent households expressed distrust of others. These three participants were all children of other participants. In total, eleven of fifteen participants self-reported that they trust others easily.

Table 3: Upbringing and Self-Reported Trust

Participant	Family Name	Breadwinner	Self-reported as Trusting	Self-reported as Distrusting	Reported Class of Upbringing
Dave	Martin	X		X	Middle-class
Holly	Martin		X		Working-class
Mark	Jones	X	X		Working-class
Mary	Jones		X		Working-class
Alice	Jones			X	Affluent
Theo	Hughes	X	X		Middle-class
Elizabeth	Hughes		X		Working-class
James	Randall	X	X		Middle-class
Emma	Randall			X	Affluent
Ruth	Johnson		X		Working-class

Jack	Davis		X		Working-class
Amelia	Anderson		X		Working-class
Edith	Williams	X	X		Working-class
George	Williams			X	Affluent
Evelyn	Williams		X		Middle-class

All eleven participants who reported that they trust others easily self-reported that they were not raised in affluence. While research indicates that the public's perception of who qualifies as "middle-class" or "working-class" often includes people sociologists would likely define as affluent or upper-class, subjective SES is a useful and relevant measure when analyzing self-perception and personal experiences (Cashell 2008; Tan et al. 2020).

Elizabeth, an older woman whose husband is the breadwinner, reported that she trusts others easily. When asked if she has always trusted others easily, she explains that her working-class upbringing taught her that others in her community are trustworthy.

> *I think it's probably because of my age. And you know, how I grew up. It was just, you know, you… you knew your neighbors, you trusted your neighbors, you know? That sort of thing. It was more of a community type stuff, right, where you felt like everybody was there to help each other. And that's really why I trust people.*

Another participant, Amelia, says she trusts others easily because her father, who was a truck driver, raised her in a small town where people trusted each other.

> *I think it was just a different time back then. Where we lived in a small town and every everybody tended to know everybody and therefore trust everybody.*

One of the most affluent participants, James, reports that he, "start[s] out assuming people are honest and trustworthy." A total of five participants including James, quoted Ronald Reagan in response to the question, "How trusting are you of other people?" James says,

> *Generally, I would say I, I, I always start out generally trusting people. Depending on the situation, it's kind of like Ronald Reagan, "trust but verify".*

Of the four participants who reported being skeptical of others, three were raised in affluence. One participant who reports an affluent upbringing, George, reported that he estimates he is, "less trusting than the average person." George also expressed discomfort disclosing details about his finances to his fiancé, even though he said he had never questioned her trustworthiness. When asked how he would feel if his fiancé asked for details about his finances, George responded, "My first reaction is always, where's this coming from?"

When asked if growing up in affluence affected her ability to trust others, "Emma" says she is "guarded or vigilant" around new people.

> *I don't go around letting people know that I have money. So, I think that's protected me a lot from having people ask me for money or ask if they can borrow money or things like that. So, I don't feel like I've had a lot of that. And that would make me have difficulty trusting, but I think being affluent makes me like less likely to let people know that. I guess because I don't want to deal with those kinds of situations.*

Alice is the third participant who grew up in affluence and reported difficulty trusting others. When asked why she knows a lot about her friends' finances, but they don't know about her own finances she says that her parents have warned her about sharing her financial status with others.

> *…I don't know if it like, if it's been warnings from my dad over time. Like, I've never had an experience, but I am fearful of that turning into, 'Well, why doesn't Alice just pay for everything?' …I don't know that that's ever happened to me… Actually, I have seen it happen but not to me. It happens to my parents with my family. And they probably told you because my mom finally figured it out, years ago, what was going on. And I had always known. I'm sure my dad was just totally oblivious. But she finally figured it out. And when she did it was like, 'Oh, they're all asking me to pay for everything, do everything.' And it's like, 'Yeah, they are and you do it and they keep doing it.'*

Here, Alice reports that having seen her family expect her mother, Mary, to "pay for everything" has affected Alice's own willingness to trust others. In fact, each of these three participants who were raised in affluence and reported that it had affected their willingness to trust others, all had parents who expressed that affluence had *not* affected their own willingness to trust others.

This phenomenon leads me to expect that in order for affluence to affect one's self-perception of being a trusting or distrusting person, they must have experienced affluence as a child, during that crucial period of development of the self (Cashell n.d.; Tan et al. 2020).
The idea that those raised in affluence are most aware of their distrust of others indicates, in the very least, that a key source of distrust among the affluent may be found in their familial socialization. Are affluent parents warning their children to be wary that others may take advantage of them for financial gain? If the affluent are being taught that they must be wary of

the intentions of others, this would certainly indicate some degree of social isolation, furthering the case that the affluent struggle with anomie. Further investigation of why, exactly, it is that those raised in affluence are more distrusting than others will further hone our understanding on the relationship between anomie, trust, morality, and affluence.

4.3 Discrepancies in Self-Perception of Trust

Table 3 shows that all but four participants report that it is easy to earn their trust. This question, “How trusting are you of other people?” is the first question asked. However, these same eleven participants display some discrepancy between how they perceive their own willingness to trust and how willing they are to engage in behaviors that require trust, like sharing vulnerabilities or loaning money (Johnson-George and Swap 1982; Larzelere and Huston 1980; Rempel et al. 1985; Rotter 1980; Sasaki and Marsh 2012). As the interviews progressed, these eleven expressed distrust about others and their intentions. One participant, Mary, told many stories about how her family had abused her trust. However, Mary was adamant that she is “generally quite trusting,” despite describing herself as “guarded” and as someone who struggles to trust her own family.

> *I’m very much an introvert and so when you asked if I trust people… typically, I do because … I don't lie and I'm so naive in that. But then at the same time I'm always holding back just because- I don't know if that's a protective mechanism for me. Or if it's just the uncomfortable part of me, the anxiety of me, not wanting to put myself out there. So, I generally just take people for what they say and accept that they're telling me the truth. Unless, of course, it's in my own family.*

One married couple, Theo and Elizabeth, both reported that being affluent had not affected their willingness to trust others, but both also reported having lost trust in close family members due to incidents involving money. Theo reported having trouble trusting other family members after loaning money to a relative who did not pay it back.

> **AT**
> *I would like to know what [family members] have done that has eroded your trust.*
> **Theo**
> *Not paid me back when they should. When... I made a long-term loan to a relative. It's pulling teeth to get paid back.*
> **AT**
> *And that makes you reluctant to give them money in the future.*
> **Theo**
> *Oh, absolutely.*
> **AT**
> *Did that make you feel taken advantage of?*
> **Theo**
> *Yes, it does.*
> **AT**
> *Did that make you feel skeptical about other people in your family?*
> **Theo**
> *Yes.*

Elizabeth also reported having lost trust in family members after loaning money that wasn't paid back. When asked if she is comfortable sharing details about her finances with her sister, with whom she is quite close, she replies:

> *I don't think I'd give her specific details. There's two… two of her sons have come to us for money. And we did give to both. One is still making payments, but the other…[he] hasn't paid it off and he has the money to.*

Of the four participants who reported that they are distrusting of others, Dave was the only participant with any discrepancy between his self-reported lack of trust for others and his behavior. The other eleven participants who displayed a discrepancy between their self-reported willingness to trust others and their behavior all reported that they easily trust others. Dave says, “I think that I am naturally suspicious of others,” but Dave also stated that he does not trust people who are “naturally suspicious”, using the exact same words.

> *I think people that are naturally suspicious, who want to record things and double check, I think those are the people that are untrustworthy. That’s my theory on life anyway.*

Dave tells us something important about self-perception and trust: we want to believe that we are trusting of others. Perhaps this is because we perceive those who are “naturally suspicious”, or distrusting, as less deserving of our own trust. It is a common refrain that those who cast the most doubt about the intentions of others think that way because they, themselves, are dishonest or have dubious intentions. Even the three participants who self-reported being distrusting of others also reported that they have loving and trusting relationships with those closest to them, especially with their spouses.

Significantly, almost every participant who reported having lost trust in a family member also reported maintaining a relationship with the family member who had lost their trust. That is to say, lying, cheating, and even stealing were not relationship-ending events. Participants reported adjusting their own behavior by refraining from loaning money or sharing vulnerabilities, but they did not report that these experiences made them less-trusting people. This desire to be a person who is trusting and open to others may prove to be a barrier to accurate self-assessment regarding trust.

4.4 Talking (and Not Talking) about Money

Ten of fifteen participants reported feeling reluctant to discuss finances with family. Unsurprisingly, the five participants who reported feeling comfortable discussing details about their finances with family members reported having close and trusting relationships with their families. However, seven of the ten participants who were not comfortable discussing money with family also reported having close and trusting relationships with their families. The reluctance to discuss finances ranged from a refusal to discuss anything related to their own financial situation to an unease disclosing specific numbers describing net worth or savings.

Ruth is unequivocal in her response to a question about sharing financial details with her sisters, whom she reports having close relationships with. This was the only point in our interview where Ruth changed her jovial, warm demeaner and became agitated. Her answers became shorter, her tone harsher, and she raised her voice in both pitch and volume.

> **AT**
> *How much do your sisters know about your finances?*
> **Ruth**
> *Well, they know what I see. They know what they see. Ya, know what I mean? And I pretty much [have] been on the same path for a long time: okay with what I have.*
> **AT**
> *So, but, they don't have a number.*
> **Ruth**
> *No way.*
> **AT**
> *What if they asked you for a number? Would you tell them?*
> **Ruth**
> *No, I would not.*
> **AT**
> *Why is that?*
> **Ruth**
> *Because it's not their business. This day and age, you can look it up. Now, you know the address... I mean, if you know the address, just put it in. And you'll, you'll get an idea, ya know, because I've*

> *had these houses, ya know? For 30 years. So, they know what they know… what the houses are worth. But no, they don't ask.*
> **AT**
> *Would you be suspicious about why they're asking?*
> **Ruth**
> *Yes.*

Just a moment later, when asked about loaning money to her sisters, Ruth ties her unwillingness to loan money to them to an experience when she lost trust in a close friend ("the girl with the two children") after the friend failed to repay a large, personal loan.

> **AT**
> *Have you ever loaned money to your sisters in the past? Or gifted?*
> **Ruth**
> *No. They've asked. I won't do it.*
> **AT**
> *And why not?*
> **Ruth**
> *Remember the girl with the two children? Yeah. So that is not happening. I am not. Yeah, she said that was she was gonna pay me back. It's not happening. I am not loaning money. Don't ask to borrow money.*

One reason described by participants for this reluctance is a feeling as though it is uncouth or simply improper to discuss money. Seven participants reported that they had been brought up being told that it is impolite to discuss money, and each of these participants concluded that it is impolite to discuss money because a large difference in wealth may make others jealous or uncomfortable.

Edith, like Ruth, is the matriarch of her family. She says she does not discuss money with her children because, "I just grew up not discussing finances," and says she was taught that it is impolite. When asked why she thinks it is impolite to discuss finances, she says that it may make others uncomfortable. Tellingly, she concludes that she is concerned that her family may come to resent the inequality.

AT
So, how comfortable are you sharing details about your finances with your siblings?
Edith
Not comfortable.
AT
Why is that?
Edith
Just because my husband and I have probably a lot more money than my siblings do. And so, it's just not discussed.
AT
Is that because you think it would make them feel uncomfortable?
Edith
I don't know. That and I remember my dad always told me you know, there's certain things you don't ever tell anyone. You don't tell them how much you paid for your car, okay, and that type of thing. So, I mean, I've learned that.
AT
Okay, so it's sort of impolite to discuss finances?
Edith
Yeah. Okay. And I remember, you know that when we first got married, and my husband would say, "Oh geez, you know, that truck set me back X amount of dollars." And I was really uncomfortable with that. And we just we didn't discuss it.
AT
Why is that?
Edith
Yeah, I just… I just don't think that's something you should share.
AT
Is there any way you could maybe describe what is it that makes you uncomfortable about it?
Edith
I don't know… we'll use the car example. If you buy a car that you pay $70,000 for and somebody else was excited because they just got a car that they paid $25,000 for, and you're telling them, that is just bragging to me.
AT
Okay, bragging that's a good word. So, you don't want to make them feel bad?
Edith

Right. They may end up resenting you for it.

Edith's fear of resentment from her family was echoed in at least five other interviews. Mary reports being very close to her family, including her sister, but she also says of sharing her finances with her sister, "It's none of [her] business." Mary says over and over in response to probes about why she feels uncomfortable discussing finances that, "It's just not something we discuss." When asked separately about whether her parents discussed their finances with her, she says, "It's not something that was discussed. Matter of fact, finances weren't even discussed in our household with, between the four of us growing up. Yeah, we never, it's not something that was ever discussed." Finally, after some more discussion, Mary says that she doesn't talk about money with her sister, whom she is close to, because it is *Mary* who resents her sister's requests for money.

AT
What about with [your sister]? Do you talk to [your sister] about your finances?
Mary
No.
AT
Why not?
Mary
Because all she's ever done is poor mouth.
[Long pause]
AT
It's just… it's a conversation you don't want to have because she'll make you feel guilty?
Mary
It makes me feel guilty. The flipside is it makes me...I feel guilty but at the same time, have I never felt proud or pride? No. I do feel proud about it. Part of it's like, if I feel frustration with knowing that. I will try to figure out- of course, this would be a conversation- but if [my sister's family] has a very hard way, "What did y'all do with all your money?" Right? "What did you do with the money [your husband] earns?" But you know, I just said

> *that to you. No, I would never have a financial conversation with her.*

Mary's reflection here is representative of how several participants said they don't discuss finances with family because they don't want to be pressured into loaning or giving money away. In response to questions about why they don't discuss money with their families, most participants, like Mary, said they felt frustrated by the way their family handled their own money.

These participants who are uncomfortable discussing finances with their families mostly said that they don't discuss money because it is impolite and that they don't want to make their family uncomfortable. But Mary and Edith's interviews represent a trend. Participants were deeply reluctant to explain why they were so uncomfortable with these conversations about money, or why they thought these conversations were impolite. It is my inference that the participants were hesitant to explain that they did not want to be asked for money. When asked why they think discussing money makes people uncomfortable, only two respondents managed to conclude that it is the inequality in their circumstances, and the implication that the participants *could* give their families money, that makes these conversations uncomfortable, and, therefore, impolite.

This is the elephant in the room of every family gathering. Whether it's vacations, shopping trips, or eating out, participants reported discomfort navigating conversations about who will pay for what. When Alice says that her mother, Mary, was paying for her family's outings too frequently, she says that it made her less trusting of others. Affluent people learn that their generosity and honesty lead to uncomfortable conversations in the least, and major betrayals, at worst. While this failure to communicate may insulate the affluent from uncomfortable truths, it also creates distance between themselves and their families, and avoids any substantive analysis of the problem that is so necessary for resolution.

4.5 Summary of Findings

Three themes emerged during data analysis. The first and most ubiquitous finding is the discrepancy represented by the participants' self-perception of their own willingness to trust others and their willingness to engage in behaviors that require trust. While twelve of fifteen interviewees reported that they trust others easily, these same twelve interviewees reported that due to previous incidents of betrayal or lost trust, they were unlikely to engage in behaviors that require trust, like loaning money or sharing secrets.

Second, three of the fifteen interviewees were raised in affluent household, and each of these three individuals also reported that, converse to the twelve interviewees discussed in the first finding, they do *not* trust others easily. This connection between upbringing and self-reported willingness to trust others was consistent and meaningful.

Finally, ten of fifteen interviewees were reluctant to discuss money with their family, despite seven members of this subset of ten also reporting that they are close to their families.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 How Does Affluence Affect Trust?

To better understand how affluence affects interpersonal trust, I interviewed fifteen affluent people. Eight were breadwinners and seven were their family members. I used home value to define affluence because the literature indicates that this is a better measure of class than net worth (Bloome and Furey 2019; Friedland et al. 2002; Wolff 2017; Wolff and Zacharias 2007). To qualify, participants had to be over the age of 20, living in the US, and have a home valued at double the median US home value.

Due to the discrepancy between self-perception and reported behaviors found in twelve of the fifteen interviews, findings regarding the overall effects of affluence on trust are tentative. However, it can be concluded that the relationship observed in this research between the class of one's upbringing and their reported willingness to trust others tells us something significant. Findings indicate that an affluent upbringing leads to adults who are more suspicious of others and their intentions. Additionally, the frequency of reports among interviewees that close family members had taken advantage of their relationship for monetary gain, resulting in increased boundaries in that relationship can only lead us to conclude that affluence does negatively impact interpersonal trust. Whether or not the affluent choose to incorporate these experiences, behavioral changes, and increased boundaries caused by a decrease in trust in close relationships into their conception of their personal idea of their overall willingness to trust others will be better understood by future research focused on self-conception of trust, but does not negate the overarching finding that participants had lost trust in close family members as a result of incidents involving money.

5.2 Analysis and Recommendations for Future Research

As Durkheim so carefully described, we must trust those around us to be socialized by them (Durkheim 1897; Durkheim and Simpson 1933; Hilbert 1989; Marks 1974). If the affluent are unwilling to engage in behaviors that require trust like talking about money or sharing secrets and vulnerabilities, then do they actually trust those closest to them enough to rely on them for socialization? Whether they are aware of it or not, the affluent behave like people who do not trust those around them. In fact, tracking generational wealth and its consolidation indicates that, as the American middle-class continues to shrink, those who remain affluent will increasingly have been raised in affluent households (OECD 2019; Menasce-Horowitz et al. 2020; Keister and Moller 2000; Noah 2012; Wolff 2017). My findings indicate that these individuals will find it difficult to trust others and that they will be aware of their distrust. Therefore, suffering from an anomic existence, these affluent individuals will not have the opportunity to be socialized in any particular moral direction. Bereft of trusting relationships and morality, they will be left in power to create and enforce policy influenced by their own moral corruption.

Having found that twelve of fifteen participants self-reported that they trust others easily, while also reporting that they struggle to engage in behaviors that require trust, like loaning money or sharing vulnerabilities, my research indicates that the affluent struggle to honestly assess or report their own willingness to trust (Larzelere and Huston 1980; Rotter 1980). This finding has significant implications for future research about affluence and trust. Knowing that people present themselves as easy to trust will guide future researchers to employ methods that can circumnavigate this discrepancy between self-perception and behavior. Without further investigation into this phenomenon, it will remain unclear whether people honestly judge that they trust easily, or that they simply wish to appear to others as though they trust easily.

Aside from affecting the ability to research trust and affluence, this discrepancy in self-perception and behavior also indicates that the affluent are more willing to adjust their own behavior to account for a lack of trust in a relationship than they are willing to distance themselves from a relationship that lacks trust. Brook Harrington's research as a wealth manager for the elite found that the super-wealthy often use their wealth managers to shield them from financial liability imposed by fraught relationships. Clients often enlisted the service of financial mangers like Harrington to mitigate risk from close personal family members by hiding assets and carefully building wills and trusts (Harrington 2016). This is reminiscent of the conflict-avoidant behavior my interviewees described. Participants reported that, rather than confront a family member who had lost their trust or distance themselves from that individual all together, they preferred to alter the boundaries of that relationship. If a participant lost trust in a family member, they would simply no longer engage in behaviors that require trust with that individual. They did not report desiring to spend less time with the individual involved, or even that these trust-losing events had an especially negative impact on the relationship itself. Are the affluent compartmentalizing their relationships to avoid losing them? Are they in denial about the effect losing trust has on a relationship, or are they largely unbothered when they lose trust in family members?

It is possible that the discrepancy between self-perception and behavior can be better understood by analyzing the participants' reluctance to discuss money or finances. John Rotter's research conceptualizing interpersonal trust found that honesty was the most important factor for developing and defining trust (Rotter 1967, 1980). If the wealthy claim to trust easily, why are they unwilling to be honest with their family about money? Rotter's research indicates that if the affluent were truly trusting of their family members and their intentions, they should be open and honest about their finances.

This discrepancy begins to make more sense when put into context with previous ethnographic research about the affluent. Harrington's research revealed that her clients struggled to trust those closest to them, specifically regarding financial matters. Financial trusts and estate management were ground zero for conflicts with trusted family members in Harrington's research (2016). Many participants in my own research reported that they lost trust in their siblings when it came time to formulate their own wills or distribute the estates of other family members. These same participants reported that they trust others easily.

These findings, when taken together and integrated into literature regarding affluence and trust, point to a larger, broader phenomenon. If the affluent report that they trust easily, but will not engage in trusting behaviors, specifically regarding finances, it can be concluded that affluence is at the root of their skeptical behaviors and interfamilial conflicts. Furthermore, I infer that affluent people do not like to think about or discuss money or finances because reflection on this topic would force contemplation or discussion about the overwhelming state of economic inequality, particularly when it comes to inequality in their own families. Any discussion or contemplation about finances are influenced by the fact that some family members have more power and money than others. Consciously or subconsciously, contemplation of this fact automatically opens the door to an uncomfortable truth: affluent people are *capable* of giving more money to others (no matter how much they already give) and they choose not to. Is this why it is impolite to discuss finances? Is it impolite because it may embarrass those who have less, or because of the inherent implication that there is an easily solvable problem of inequality the affluent do not wish to solve?

Sociologists, economists, political scientists, and the like have attempted to solve the inequality problem for centuries from the bottom up (Bank 2016; Blau and Blau 1982; Bradley and Cole 2002; DiBiase and Miller 2015; Pickett and Pearl 2001). The relative accessibility of the impoverished, as well as cultural stories we tell each other about bootstraps and golden roads, have guided research. This tendency avoids an uncomfortable truth: when the affluent have so much power, they are capable of solving the inequality problem, but they may be actively avoiding solutions. With a better understanding of the social psychology of the affluent, we can begin to unpack the barriers between self-perception and reality that prevent us from having substantive, results-focused conversations about the social responsibility of the affluent to solve a problem they create and perpetuate.

The finding that the only three participants raised in affluent households were also three of the four participants who were open about and aware of their distrust of others may provide hope. With greater self-awareness of an issue comes an ability to respond to and ameliorate the issue. If people raised in affluence are more aware that they struggle to trust others, they may more easily approach the concept that this distrust is caused by inequality and, perhaps eventually, to approach the concept that they are the ones most capable of and responsible for ameliorating inequality. With this finding in mind, future research may find it fruitful to focus on those who were raised in affluence and how they conceptualize and rationalize their participation in the perpetuation of inequality.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Key:

- Primary prompts
    - Optional probes
        - Additional optional probes

A. Trust

- How trusting are you of other people?
    - How easy is it to earn your trust?
- Who in your family do you not trust?
    - What sort of things have they done or said that eroded your trust?
- How do you know whether you can trust someone or not?
- What things can someone do when you meet them to earn your trust?
    - What can someone do to erode your trust?
- Is it easy for you to trust people?
    - Was it always like that?
        - IF NO, what changed?

B. Family and relationships

Now, I want to talk a little bit about your family when you were growing up.

- Describe your family for me when you were growing up.
    - Do you have any siblings?
- Were your parents trusting individuals?
    - Why or why not?
    - Did your parents trust each other?
- Describe your family for me as it is currently.
    - Are your parents still alive?
        - IF YES: Do you have trusting relationships with your parents now?
            - Why or Why not?
    - Are your siblings still alive?
        - IF YES: Do you have trusting relationships with them now?
            - Why or Why not?
        - Describe your interactions with them.
    - IF HAS SPOUSE:
        - How important is trust in your relationship with your spouse?
        - Tell me about a time when you questioned your spouse's trustworthiness.
            - IF you've never questioned it, why not?
            - How do you know you can trust your spouse?
    - IF NO SPOUSE:
        - What are some of the things that matter most to you in a relationship?
        - How important is trust in a relationship?

  - IF HAS CHILD/REN:
    - Do your child/ren trust easily?
    - How can you tell if your child/ren are trustworthy?
- Who do you trust the most?
  - What makes you trust them?
- Tell me about an incident when someone in your family lost your trust. What happened?
    - How does that affect your ability to trust?
- Tell me about an incident when someone in your family gained or regained your trust. What happened?
    - How does that affect your ability to trust?

C. Affluence

I'm going to switch topics here and I want to talk about affluence.

- What do you think it means for someone to be affluent? OR What is affluence to you?
- Did you grow up affluent? What did that mean to you? OR how did affluence affect you as a child?
- Do you consider yourself to be affluent now? Why or why not?
- How do finances affect your relationships?
- How much does your family know about your finances?
  - How comfortable are you sharing details about your finances with your family?
- What sorts of discussions do you have with family about money?
  - Have you discussed planning your estate with your family?
    - How did they respond to these discussions?
- Tell me about a time when you wondered if a person in your life was more interested in your money than your relationship.
  - What made you wonder about that person?
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with someone close to you (a family member?) about finances.
  - How did you resolve the matter?
- Overall, how has being affluent affected your willingness to trust others?

D. Philanthropy

I'd like to conclude by talking a little bit about philanthropy.

- What is your experience with philanthropy?
- What sorts of philanthropic endeavors have you witnessed or been a part of?
  - How did that/those experiences feel (affect you)?

Are there any philanthropic causes that are particularly important or special to you?

Appendix B: Flyer Distributed to Homes in Atlanta valued over $800,000