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BETTY ANN TITTLE TATTLE REPRODUCES THE UPPER CLASS: GENDER AND BOUNDARY WORK IN KANSAS CITY, 1924-1934

BY

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> "Who are those two smart looking dames kissing each other so sweetly?" asked an onlooker at Mrs. X's tea the other day.
>
> "The plump one with the pimple on her nose is Mrs. Climber, who is up for membership in a swank bridge club. The other is Mrs. Downer who is going to blackball her unless she changes her mind before a vote is taken," answered the bureau of information as they edged toward the punch bowl.
>
> *The Independent,* January 2, 1932, p. 3

Gossip, exclusion, and tea parties: these were all part of the everyday reality of upper-class women in Kansas City in the 1920s and 30s. With a simple yes or no, Mrs. Downer could effectively exclude Mrs. Climber from high society or welcome her into its privileges. This paper will explore the ways that upper-class women drew class boundaries in 1920s and 1930s Kansas City. What role did upper-class women play in class reproduction? How were class boundaries drawn differently in a boom time versus a depression? In order to answer these questions, I will first discuss the theoretical issues at stake: boundary work, class reproduction, and how gender mediates these processes. I will then provide background on *The Independent,* a profile of Kansas City's upper class, and an historical overview of the period of this study. Finally, I will discuss the ways that upper-class women drew boundaries around the upper class through social life, consumption, and childrearing.

In this paper, I will argue that (1) members of the upper class draw class boundaries according to their gender and in response to the historical moment in which they live. We must pay attention to the different ways that men and women delineate themselves from other classes, as well as how this boundary work changes over time, in order to fully understand class reproduction; and (2) *The Independent* more often criticized women's contributions to class reproduction than they did men's, reflecting power inequalities within Kansas City's upper class.

Theory

As I will argue, upper-class women drew moral boundaries against people from other classes in order to justify the exclusivity of elite organizations and social life (Lamont and Molnar: 2002). This boundary work was necessary to protect the privileges of the upper class. Bourdieu (1984) is central to the literature on class boundaries, outlining a theory of social relations that places great importance on the role of culture in class formation, maintenance, and reproduction. He describes an "economy of symbolic goods" that is fundamentally related to the money economy and interacts with it in order to create class distinctions (Lovell 2004: 49). He defines four kinds of capital that are traded in this economy of symbolic goods: (1) cultural capital, or knowledge of such "high culture" as fine wine, art, and literature; (2) social capital, or social networks and the resources that can be gained through these networks; (3) economic capital, or wealth; and (4) symbolic capital, or "the power to

define the worth and legitimacy of various kinds of capital" (Beisel 1997: 214). Individuals and families attempt to maximize their holdings in these various forms of capital in order to maintain control over their lives and the symbolic meaning of their lives (Lovell 2004: 49-50).

Bourdieu's theory places gender as secondary to the central organizing principle of society: class. Gender is socially constructed and embedded in the class structure:

> Sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon is from its acidity: a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the two sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions (Bourdieu 1984: 107-108).

The gender roles that men and women take are a part of their class position, but people's primary identity is located in their class status (Lovell 2004: 39). For Bourdieu, gender is given analytical attention only in the ways that it supports class reproduction, therefore ignoring important differences in power between men and women within the upper class. Several feminist scholars have expanded on Bourdieu's theory in order to understand how class, race and gender come together in people's lives (Fowler 2003; Lovell 2000; Reay 1998). In her analysis of Bourdieu, McCall (1992) offers a different reading of "secondary" that treats gender more seriously. She argues that gender is secondary in the sense that it is hidden, naturalized, and is found at all levels of society. If anything, this implies that gender is a more powerful category for analysis, since it is "pervasive and, as Bourdieu

insists, naturalized, doxic, and deeply structuring" (Lovell 2004: 49). In order to understand the lives of upper-class white women, we need to focus on how systems of social organization, such as class and gender, come together to shape their experiences and reproduce inequality.

Bourdieu (2001) briefly mentions that there is a gendered division of labor in how families accumulate capital. Men are in charge of acquiring economic capital, while women turn this money into a social boundary by using their refined tastes (cultural capital). The differing value placed on the contributions of men and women to the family's class status is crucial to understanding the power struggle taking place within the upper class during the time period of my study. Exploring this division of labor, as well as the value placed on men's and women's contributions to the family's class status, will help us understand the complex interactions of gender and class within the upper-class family (Lovell 2004: 52-53).

Following the work of Beisel (1997), Davidoff and Hall (1987), and Steedman (1986), this paper will examine the role that gender played in class reproduction during a specific historical period. In the 1920s and 1930s, the gendered division of class reproduction had to adjust to rapid changes in the economy and culture. This vivid example of change from an economic boom time to one of depression will illustrate the ways that boundary work must respond to the political climate of the time.

<u>The Independent: Kansas City's Weekly Journal of Society</u>

The Independent was first published in 1899 as a political magazine, and is still in publication today (Coleman 2006a: 12). In 1909, Katherine Baxter and Clara Kellogg purchased the magazine and turned it into "Kansas City's Weekly Journal of Society" (a tagline used since the April 16, 1932 issue) (personal correspondence, Heather Paxton, October 25, 2007). The 3-7 member staff, mostly unmarried women and widows (7 Jan, 1928), used pseudonyms such as Betty Ann Tittle Tattle and Meddlesome Matty.[1] They produced weekly issues that ranged in length from 11 to 24 pages. A yearlong subscription cost $2 until 1928, when the price rose to $3. Although circulation records have been lost, ads in *The Independent* in the late 1920s claimed that 90% of "the Club and Social Set" read the magazine. Coleman (2006b) counted 1,250 people in the Establishment[2] as of September 1929, with an additional 5,000 in the lower-upper class (56). This suggests a readership of anywhere between 1,125 and 4,500. Though some subscriptions were sold to former Kansas City residents living in other cities, *The Independent* was primarily a local magazine. This study covers a ten-year period (1924-1934) surrounding the stock market crash of 1929. For each year, I read the first issue in the months of January, April, July, and

1 Though *The Independent* can lead us to understand a great deal about the perspective of upper-class women, it cannot be said to be completely representative. The women on the staff differed from upper-class women at the time because they were both single and in paid employment. This limitation should be kept in mind.

2 Following its use in Coleman's (2006b) book, the term "Establishment" is used here to indicate the elite members of the upper class who occupied positions of leadership in civic affairs and were recognized as those occupying the top of the social ladder by the upper class (1-2).

October, totaling 40 magazines (n=40).

The Independent's goals were "to chronicle the doings of prominent people and our best social sets" (2 Apr, 1927) and to "recount genteel gossip interestingly but without sting" (3 Apr, 1926). True to these aims, the magazines from the period of this study (1924-1934) consisted primarily of gossip and reports on the "smart set"[3] of Kansas City. A typical magazine looked much like the January 5, 1929 edition: most of the text in this edition reported on the travel plans of Kansas City's upper class (18%), local theater, actors, and musicians (21%), and social events (21%). The remaining portion of the magazine consisted of a mix of excerpts from other publications (10%), gossip, and random musings about life in Kansas City.[4] Most of these articles were simply one or two sentences giving a brief account of a person's travel plans or the decorations at a party, rather than fully developed stories. Advertisements for clothing stores, appliances, hair salons, and other local businesses filled close to half (42%) of the 1929 magazine.

The Kansas City Upper Class

3 "Smart magazines" became popular among the educated middle- and upper-middle-classes during the 1920s. Magazines such as *The Smart Set: A Magazine of Cleverness* (founded 1900), *Vanity Fair* (founded 1913), *American Mercury* (founded 1923), and *The New Yorker* (founded 1925) offered a witty and intellectual selection of stories about fashion, restaurants, theater, art, and literature (Drowne and Huber 2004: 176-178). *The Independent* was more of a high society magazine than a "smart magazine," but it did occasionally reprint stories from *American Mercury* and *The New Yorker.* It also used the term "smart set" to describe the kind of fashionable, intelligent, and fun-loving people that appeared in these magazines.

4 These percentages reflect the number of articles about these topics (total=143), and do not account for the length of the stories. The choice of the January edition may over-represent the number of travel accounts, since many people visited friends and relatives for the Christmas holidays.

Who was in Kansas City's upper class in the 1920s and 1930s? The income for this group has historically averaged to be eight times that of the average Kansas City resident (Coleman 2006a: 17). However, income was not enough to secure a position in the Establishment: in the 1950s, one third of Kansas Citians who lived in mansions were not accepted as part of the upper class (Coleman 1971: 60). Many factors came into play when drawing boundaries between who was and was not in the upper class: place of residence, membership in elite clubs, occupation, education, and the class standing of one's parents all contributed to a person's class status. Racism, segregation, and exclusionary clauses in elite residential neighborhoods and organizations came together to exclude minorities from upper-class status.[5] Heredity has been less important in Kansas City than it has been in cities like Boston and Philadelphia (Baltzell 1958). Similar to cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, the Establishment more readily accepted new money in Kansas City. In 1929-1930, 25.2% of men and 27.7% of women in the upper class were from Establishment families at the time of their entrance into high society as adults (Coleman 2006b: 274).[6] The vast majority of the Establishment was Protestant, with Episcopalians being the most prestigious denomination (Coleman 2006b: 171).

5 Coleman (2006b: 91) argued that high society rarely elected blacks and Hispanics to prestigious positions until the 1970s. He did not think that any blacks or Hispanics had been fully accepted into the Establishment as of 1999-2000, though there were some up-and-coming people that he thought might achieve this status by 2010.

6 The importance of heredity in Kansas City's upper class has steadily grown over the years. The corresponding figures for 1887-1888 are 12.2% and 17.3%; for 1952-1953, 31.7% and 34.5%, and for 1999-2000, 46.4% and 38.4% (Coleman 2006b: 274).

Though Jews were formally excluded from many upper-class clubs, schools, and neighborhoods in the 1920s and 30s, Coleman (2006b: 57) identified 65 Jewish people (or around 5% of the Establishment) who were "status-image" equals to those in the Establishment.[7] In 1929-1930, elite men in Kansas City were employed in the following fields: the professions, 20.8%; finance, 41.1%; commerce and services, 16.5%; industry and production, 18.8%; transport and utilities, 2.3%; agriculture, 0.2%; and government, 0.3% (Coleman 2006b: 278). During this period, Kansas City's upper class was a mix of new money and old fortunes, most of whom lived in the same neighborhoods, attended the same churches, and were members in the same prestigious clubs.

Boom and Bust: Kansas City in the 1920s and 1930s

Kansas City's economy boomed during the 1920s, and the upper class reaped the profits. Twelve major railways funneled through Kansas City's newly opened Union Station, making it the second largest rail depot in the country (Coleman 2006b: 52). The number of building permits issued in Kansas City rose 65% between 1915

7 Though occasionally recognized by the Gentile Establishment, the Jewish elite in Kansas City occupied separate social worlds due to the anti-Semitism of some elite institutions. The Kansas City Club excluded Jewish members until 1968, the Junior League until 1971, and the Kansas City Country Club until 1996. In this, Kansas City followed a national trend. Prior to 1900, Jews were more readily accepted into upper-class institutions, but as Eastern European- and Russian-Jewish immigrants began to outnumber German Jews, upper-class clubs began to become more restrictive towards Jewish membership. However, some level of acceptance was apparent in Kansas City: *The Independent* printed Jewish engagement announcements since it began publication, and several elite private schools began accepting Jewish students in the 1920s (Coleman 2006b: 57, 91, 170-173).

and 1923 (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 200). Downtown retail businesses thrived, and manufacturing in Kansas City ranked in the top 12 in the United States. (Coleman 2006b: 52). Nationally, the GNP rose 43% in the 1920s (Drowne and Huber 2004: 5). The profits from these ventures and from stock market investments went disproportionately to the rich: 23.9% of all income went to the richest 1% of Americans in 1928 (Piketty and Saez 2003). Women gained the vote in 1920, and continued to increase their public presence in universities and the workplace. However, by decade's end, the booming times were promising to come to an end; a Brookings Institute study found that close to 60% of families in the U.S. in 1929 were unable to buy basic necessities.[8]

Kansas City's booming economy came to a screeching halt with the stock market crash of October 1929. By 1934, one in ten people in Kansas City were on direct public relief. This number, which was nearly half that of many other cities its size, was due, in part, to the large number of government construction projects initiated under the Ten Year Plan. Kansas City voters passed this $40 million citywide construction project designed to create jobs and re-vamp the city by a margin of four to one (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 214, 216).[9] In 1934, 22% of the American population, or 28 million people, took part in federal relief programs. Unemployment reached 25%, its highest point, in 1933 (McGovern 2000: 14, 42).

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8 Maurice Levin, Harold G. Moulton, and Clark Warburton, *America's Capacity to Consume* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1934), 54, 56. Cited in McGovern 2000: 5.

9 The project was backed by Kansas City's political boss, Tom Pendergast, and proved profitable for his Ready-Mixed Concrete Co.

Marriage and fertility rates dropped across the country, as couples put off marriage and family until more promising times.[10] Kansas City's population growth, which, prior to the Depression, exceeded the national average, reflected this national trend. The 1930 census reported 399,746 residents, a number decreased to 399,178 in 1940 (Coleman 2006b: 59). With a scarcity of well-paid jobs, social critics and policy makers criticized women's public employment and implemented policies that effectively banned them from many government jobs. The Depression hit those at the bottom the hardest: the Urban League established a community garden in Kansas City in 1933 in order to help feed needy African Americans who received little help from government agencies (Coulter 2006: 277-280). The relief agency at Fifth and Main attracted many of the city's homeless and became a common place for more wealthy Kansas Citians to shop for day-laborers (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 225).

Kansas City’s Establishment saw a number of its members drop from its ranks immediately following the crash, while others' fortunes slowly crumbled. *The Independent* provided several glimpses of this downward mobility: Meddlesome Matty wondered about “young Mrs. Y’s sudden turn to a disagreeable disposition--could be the result of a heavy financial loss in her own name?” (1 Jul, 1933: 9). She also noted “how hard-pressed is one of the town’s bachelors, who has from time to time dwelt in luxury-but now even his telephone has been disconnected” (4 Oct,

10 Only three-quarters as many people were getting married in 1932 as were in the late 1920s. The birth rate dropped from 98 births per 1,000 women of childbearing age in 1925-1929 to 76 births per 1,000 in 1936-1937 (Hembold 1987: 638).

1930: 11). Robert Long, a prominent Kansas City lumber tycoon, watched his $30 to $50 million-dollar estate dwindle before his death in March 1934; his family auctioned his antique furniture and artwork in October (DeAngelo 1987: 114, 123). Though many families fell out of the upper class during the 1930s, the percentage of the population considered to be part of the Establishment stayed constant: 0.322% in the fall of 1929 versus 0.323% in the fall of 1938 (Coleman 2006b: 61). The upper class brought in new members to replace those who were hit hard by the Depression. These new members were needed in order to financially sustain upper-class social institutions, such as private clubs, golf courses, and country clubs, which struggled to maintain memberships (Coleman 2006b: 61). Between 1930 and 1934, federal taxes paid by such recreational groups declined by half. Golf clubs across the nation turned from private memberships to a daily-fee system in order to stay financially feasible after losing about a million members (Wecter 1967 [1948]: 219). Common professions to enter the Establishment in the '30s were lawyers (particularly those that served upper-class clients), architects, engineers, doctors, and corporate executives (Coleman 2006b: 61). Kansas City's upper class in the 1930s was a group experiencing dramatic change.

These economic changes took place amidst a Kansas City where gambling, violence, alcohol, sex, and jazz were all readily available. Prohibition may have gone into effect on January 16, 1920, but it was hard to tell in Kansas City. The head of

Kansas City's Democratic political machine, Tom Pendergast,[11] who also owned a liquor distributorship, used his control of the city's police force to protect the city's many speakeasies, clubs, and houses of prostitution, which the city regularly inspected for venereal diseases. A reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote in 1934: "If you want excitement [...] with roulette, cards, dice, the races...ask a patrolman on the Kansas City streets. He'll guide you" (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 220). Nude women waited tables at the Chesterfield Club, while marijuana and live jazz could be found 24-hours a day at the many clubs clustered around the 18th and Vine district and on 12th street. Violence was commonplace: a series of high-profile kidnappings made headlines in the early 30s. Friends of bank robber Frank Nash riddled the parking lot of Union Station with bullets on June 17, 1933, in a failed attempt to free him from federal custody, leaving Nash and four others dead. The March 28, 1934 edition of *The New York Times* featured the headline "Scores of Men and Women Slugged--Thugs Roam Streets With Machine Guns" over a story that described election violence in Kansas City the day before. Four were left dead after the violent election, which left Pendergast's "Little Tammany" firmly in power (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 197-222).[12]

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11 Though Pendergast was a prominent figure in Kansas City public life, he was not mentioned in any of the issues of *The Independent* looked at for this study.

12 Elections were not only violent in Kansas City, they were also fraudulent. One funeral home in Kansas City registered 17 occupants. The city listed 270,000 voters, which was 50% higher than would be expected of the population of 400,000. Members of Pendergast's Democratic machine offered money and alcohol for votes, and people frequently voted under several different names (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 227).

Kansas City reflected national racial tensions of the 1920s and 30s. The black population in Kansas City, Missouri rose 30.3% between 1910 and 1920, and racist sentiments grew with it. The Ku Klux Klan held its national "klonvokation" in Kansas City's Convention Hall in 1924 (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 198, 200). However, Kansas City's African American population could get some help from the Pendergast political machine, which found its strongest political support among immigrants (6% of Kansas City's 1930 population), Jews, and African Americans (10% of 1930 population) (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 231).[13] In exchange, these groups gained employment and a friend with powerful connections. Men looking for work formed lines outside Pendergast's office at 1908 Main Street: by the mid-1930s, he controlled 6,000 government jobs (Montgomery and Kasper: 212, 227). Though many members of Kansas City's upper class secretly dealt with Pendergast on a regular basis, others led the resistance to Machine rule in the late 1930s.[14] Centered around the middle- and upper class residential areas in the South, these activists publicized the fraud and corruption of the Pendergast machine and helped elect one of their own, John B. Gage, as mayor in 1939 (Coleman 2006b: 60-61)[15].

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13 The black vote in Kansas City switched from 80% Republican in 1922 to 70% Democrat in 1932. The popularity of FDR accounts for part of this, but Pendergast's policies in Kansas City also affected this switch (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 223).

14 Rabbi Samuel S. Mayerberg was the first to lead a public campaign against Pendergast in 1932. Pendergast's ties to the underworld made him a formidable political target: Mayerberg took to sleeping with a pistol and had bulletproof glass installed in his car. This proved to be a wise investment, as his car was later sprayed with bullets (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 229).

15 By this time, Pendergast himself was in prison on charges of tax evasion. The once powerful boss had come under serious investigation from Federal prosecutors in 1936, and was convicted in May, 1939.

Social Life: Upper-Class Women as Gatekeepers

Elite Clubs and Volunteer Organizations

Though people in all economic classes socialize, the role that sociability plays in drawing class boundaries is particularly important for the upper class since elite social institutions are so exclusive and the social networks available through them are so valuable. Upper-class women in Kansas City acted as the gatekeepers to formal social institutions, such as country clubs and volunteer organizations, as well as to informal social events, such as tea parties and holiday parties. This role provided upper-class women with a great deal of control over who was allowed to join elite social circles. Though Coleman's (1971) data is from 25 years after this study date, it indicates the prevalence of participation in formal elite social organizations among Kansas City's elite:

	Upper-Upper Class	**Lower-Upper Class**
M: average # of memberships	7.5	6.6
W: average # of memberships	5.7	4.4
M: active in business & prof. org.	100%	100%
M: private town or country clubs	86%	78%
M: volunteer community service	69%	52%
W: women's exclusive social clubs	100%	81%
W: volunteer community service	94%	76%
W: informal bridge & card clubs	95%	84%

(Coleman 1971: 75) Data from 1955; M=men, W=women.

From these data we can see some differences between men's and women's participation in elite organizations. Men's participation was highest in business-centered organizations, while women's was highest in social clubs. Women were also more active in volunteer activities. Men's organizations were less exclusive than women's: 100% of upper-class men participated in "business and professional organizations," but this figure only dropped to an average of 81% for the upper-middle class, and to 36% of the lower-middle class. There was a much steeper drop-off for women's clubs. While 100% of upper-upper-class women participated in these clubs, the average figure for the upper-middle class was 21%, and there were not any members from the lower-middle class. This indicates that women's elite organizations played a larger role in drawing class boundaries.

A primary way that women maintained elite social networks was through volunteer work. Being admitted to elite volunteer organizations, such as the Junior League, could boost a woman's own social standing, as well as her family's[16]. Upper-class women's volunteer work in Kansas City has historically been centered around children's charities, hospitals, and such cultural institutions as the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Kansas City Art Institute, and the Kansas City Symphony (Coleman 2006b: 289). The education that girls received enabled them to participate

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16 Domhoff (1971), Ostrander (1984), Kaplan Daniels (1988), and Kendall (2002) argued that upper-class women's volunteer activities have the appearance of ameliorating class inequality without making any real social changes, thereby deflecting criticism of the upper class.

in culture-centered volunteer activities as an adult. Volunteer work was a way of investing cultural capital to get other rewards, such as club memberships, titles, and social esteem (Wilson and Musick 1997). These volunteer activities were time-consuming for upper-class women, contributing to some critiques in *The Independent* of women who failed to participate in social life enough. In 1933, Meddlesome Matty wondered: “If her social calendar is really so full she can’t acknowledge her obligations--what with a retinue of servants, etc” (1 Apr, 1933: 7). [17] Though they took away time from other aspects of life, volunteer activities were crucial for developing elite social networks.

Kansas City was late in developing markers of high culture compared to other cities of its size; cities like New York and Boston saw a marked increase in the number of exclusive upper-class institutions, such as boarding schools and art museums, in the late 1800s (Beisel 1997: 13). The importance of volunteer work in drawing class boundaries in Kansas City became steadily more important in the early 1930s. In the 1920s, public service was not yet an important part of the upper-class lifestyle, except for the young women involved in the Junior League. Exhibiting cultural knowledge through arts-based public service became more important in drawing class boundaries with the opening of the Nelson-Atkins Art Museum, the University of Kansas City, and the Philharmonic Orchestra in 1933 (Coleman 2006b: 61). Volunteering was not just a more cost effective strategy for drawing class

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17 Writing about women in the 1970s, Kaplan Daniels (1988) used the term "invisible careers" to describe the time and emotional commitments required of elite volunteers.

boundaries. The opening of these cultural institutions was part of a long-term effort on the part of the upper class to establish high culture in Kansas City. For example, the primary benefactor of the art museum, William Rockhill Nelson, left his estate to the museum with his death in 1915. The opening of these institutions in the early 1930s, just as some members of the upper class's ability to draw boundaries through consumption were diminished, allowed the upper class to draw boundaries by displaying their knowledge of art, music, and education through volunteer work.

Another way that women maintained exclusive social networks was through elite clubs. The Kansas City Country Club has always been the top tier of Kansas City society, with several other clubs for men and women offering varying levels of prestige along with membership. Coleman's (1971) research of the class structure in Kansas City in the 1950s found that, though members from other classes did not know the difference between upper-class social clubs, elite Kansas Citians were all aware of the prestige associated with different clubs (41). These distinctions mattered to members of the upper class, and since they were the ones drawing social boundaries, their feelings made the distinctions between clubs important. Generally speaking, the more exclusive the club, the greater the ability it had to draw a distinction. For example, the prestigious '81 Club, a women's study club founded in 1881 and still in existence today, has always limited its membership to 20 women from Kansas City's top families (Coleman 2006b: 207-208). The small number of members, together with the references required to get a membership, guaranteed that

these clubs would facilitate elite social networks.

Attitudes Toward Climbers and the Nouveau Riche

Articles in *The Independent* listed a number of reasons for excluding newcomers from social events and organizations. Upper-class women had the symbolic power to say what "appropriate" behavior was, so they could criticize those who did not follow their rules, and use this as a basis for exclusion. The author of this story provided many justifications for excluding this "ambitious climber":

> Indeed so anxious was she to get into the inner set that a sumptuous tea party was planned and milady, after due consultation of the *Social Register*, proceeded to spread invitations to a lot of persons she had never seen. Probably the sound of their names appealed to her, for added to her ignorance of social custom, she attempted to assemble many who for good reasons would have sent regrets anyway. By this time, doubtless she has sensed that a camel may pass through the eye of a needle with more ease than the portals of exclusive society may be crashed by a rank stranger. (7 Jan, 1928: 17)

This story asserts upper-class women’s right to draw social boundaries. This newcomer could not participate in upper-class social life until these gatekeepers chose her. This invite-only social world could not be crashed by just anyone. Second, the author of the story drew a moral boundary against this woman. Her "ignorance of social custom" gave the writer a reason to exclude her. This was seen as a moral failing on the part of the "climber," and provided justification for the social boundary that was drawn against her.

In the 1920s, articles in *The Independent* frequently drew moral boundaries

against social climbers and the "new rich." These newcomers were often able to frequent the same places as the "select set" because of their money, inciting this irritated article published in *The Independent*:

> In Palm Beach they say climbers and *nouveauz riches* are so obnoxious and their attempts to get into the select set so determined that members of that exclusive coterie have been obliged to fortify themselves by concerted action and in some instances certain well known families of prominence have packed up and fled to other resorts. Of course, everybody who goes to the famous spa is rich as Croesus, no other class being equal to the pecuniary demands there. [...]
>
> No doubt much of the criticism that these social aspirants wear diamonds in the morning and otherwise deck themselves far too spectacularly for daylight, is greatly exaggerated. The accusation recalls, however, a well known Kansas City woman's experience there many years ago when the 'social detrimental' was in the minority, rather than in the majority, as is now the case. This lady and her husband, who was very cultured and refined, as she was, arrived at one of the palatial hostelries with a wardrobe she imagined was ample for any requirement. What was her astonishment when she went down to breakfast to see women so magnificently gowned that she decided at once to pack up and go elsewhere. What her trunks contained would never suffice for evening wear, and she preferred not to appear conspicuously plain. (4 Apr, 1925: 11)

Though all guests at the resort were rich, the author drew a moral boundary against these "climbers" because they did not know the upper-class norms for dress codes. To make matters worse, the new rich in Palm Beach did not even recognize the Establishment's power to define appropriate dress codes, leaving this Kansas City woman the option of either dressing much more decadently, facing embarrassment over her “conspicuously plain” appearance, or leaving for another resort. This loss of symbolic power irritated the author. This quote also showed disdain for climbers in general, and lacked any recognition that many members of the upper class were once

"climbers" themselves.

While *The Independent* in the 1930s continued to exclude the new rich, several stories also indicated a more inclusive attitude. Since the composition of Kansas City's upper class fluctuated so much after the stock market crash of 1929 (see pages 9-10), there were more newcomers to high society during the 1930s. This 1931 quote reflected a much more ambivalent attitude toward climbers than did the previous 1925 quote:

> "Are you a snob or a climber?" bluntly inquires William Gerhardi[18] in *Harper's Bazaar.* If honest confession is good for the soul, it may be advisable to admit that most of us are a bit of both, brother. You need not expect me or the lady next door to welcome into our clique that peculiar looking woman who has recently taken up residence just across the street. She may be very virtuous and all that sort of thing, but she is wholly without class or distinction of any kind whatever, although it is as obvious as the styleless clothes she wears that she would be tickled to death to be asked to tea. The lady next door and I are snobs, you see, and she is a climber. Then too, I may as well confess that the lady next door and I would experience a sensation common to an inhabitant of one of Mahomet's seven heavens, could we but make the Janssen Place drawing-room of a Mrs. X. Climbers as well as snobs, you see? Well, I told you so. But don't despise us. The patrician lily's ancestors were vulgar onions. Someone must keep on the ladder, otherwise there would be no one to scale the top rung when one of the stanchions of Vanity Fair takes a tumble therefrom. You know that does happen now and again. Besides, if one had no ambition to progress socially the whole structure of our social world would disintegrate. When the lady next door and I grow weary of leadership, if indeed we ever attain that glorious ordainment, the peculiar looking woman across the street may be ready to succeed us. And so it goes. (4 Jul, 1931: 13)

Similar to the quote from 1925, the author continued to come up with reasons to exclude climbers from social events. She drew a moral boundary against the "woman

18 Gerhardi (1895-1977) was an English author who received much critical acclaim in the 1920s for such works as *Futility, The Polyglots,* and *Doom.*

across the street" because she was "wholly without class or distinction" and did not know how to dress well. At the same time, this author justified her position in society, and the whole system of exclusion. However, this quote also showed identification with the new rich. The author recognized the similar position that she was in to the woman across the street (they were both climbers). With such statements as “the patrician lily's ancestors were vulgar onions,” she also acknowledged the fact that her family was once considered “new rich.” This greater identification with the new rich reflected the reality that many “of the stanchions of Vanity Fair [took] a tumble therefrom” during the 1930s. The upper class needed to more readily include new members, even while it maintained its exclusivity.

Gossip and the Value of Upper-Class Women's Social Life

In the process of drawing boundaries around the upper class's elite social networks, upper-class women often utilized gossip as a means of social control. With authors named Meddlesome Matty and Betty Ann Tittle Tattle, *The Independent* openly embraced gossip and reported it diligently. The magazine often operated as the moral arbiter of the upper class, warning members when they stepped out of line. A section titled “I Wonder...” that appeared in most of the magazines reprimanded people (who remain nameless) for failing to RSVP to parties (7 Jan, 1928: 17), being too flirtatious (5 Apr, 1930: 15), or being part of a love triangle (5 Apr, 1930: 15). By printing these admonishments anonymously, authors at *The Independent* could

enforce the rules of elite social life.

However, this open embrace of gossip in *The Independent* fit seamlessly with negative stereotypes of upper-class women as vain, petty, and lacking any serious recognition of society's problems. Newspaper editorials and politicians often criticized upper-class women who belonged to literary and "social housekeeping" clubs in the early 1900s for lacking in-depth knowledge of the things they studied. Clubs often chose a different topic for study each month, which led many to criticize them as being only superficially knowledgeable (Blair: 1980). This perception can be seen in this excerpt from *The Independent:*

> Contrast the conversation of two persons who by study and observation have extended their vision over the pleasant fields of literature, fine arts and the political and economical problems of the day with that of a pair of vacant minded, aimless young women, whose great ambition seems to be to kill time with any kind of distraction, and you will get the idea. (4 Apr, 1925: 15)

The stereotype of "vacant-minded, aimless" women was often promoted in *The Independent,* both through publishing stories like this one and by printing gossip.[19] *The Independent* increased upper-class women's ability to draw class boundaries through printing gossip, but it also promoted a negative stereotype of women as petty gossipers.

Several stories in *The Independent* also reflected some tension between husbands and wives around sociability. *The Independent* printed numerous stories about husbands who were dragged to social events by their wives. One such joke

19 This was not the only image of women presented in *The Independent.* Some stories were also published about women's careers, education, and their attempts to balance work and family.

appeared in 1933: “Visitor--Isn’t this prison life pretty hard? Number 1932--Naw, it ain’t so bad. The Warden never drags me out to a movie or bridge parties[20] in the evening” (1 July, 1933: 6). Since women were primarily responsible for planning and hosting social events for their families, they were sometimes critiqued for being too focused on socializing.

Drawing Boundaries through Consumption

Kansas City's upper class had the financial resources to draw class boundaries through consumption. By publicly displaying luxury items such as cars and fine clothing, members of Kansas City's upper class were able to clearly assert their claim to upper class status. An ad that appeared in *The Independent* throughout the 1920s to try to recruit advertisers recognized the spending power of the upper class by proclaiming that *The Independent*'s readers were “THE SPENDERS, the buyers of quality goods, of luxuries of all kinds” (6 Jul, 1929: 23; 3 Jul, 1926; 2 Jul, 1927). The advertisements in *The Independent* reflected this. Whether advertising a $450.00 silver tea set (5 Dec, 1929: 4) or a set of luggage that gave “advance notice of the smartness and good taste of its owner” (5 Jul, 1930: 3), businesses recognized the readers of *The Independent* as consumers of luxury goods. *The Independent* frequently mentioned vacations to Palm Beach, Hawaii, and Europe, trips that would

20 Card games became extremely popular during the 1930s: 50 million decks of cards were sold per year during the Depression. Bridge became particularly popular. The complicated rules could be learned through Ely Culbertson's 1931 book, *Contract Bridge Blue Book,* or through the many bridge classes offered through YMCAs and parks that had enrolled more than 500,000 people by 1931. It is estimated that 20 million people played bridge during the 1930s (Young 2002: xvii, 127).

have been out of the price range of most Americans.[21]

This emphasis on consumption was particularly strong during the economic boom of the 1920s, as the standard of living and level of expenditures increased for people at all socio-economic levels. However, consumption continued to be an important way of signifying class status for members of the upper class through the hard financial times of the 1930s. Though *The Independent* hints at signs of economic problems in the 1930s, most of the magazine remained dedicated to reporting the lives of conspicuous consumption led by the upper class. Reports of lavish parties, complete with details of the latest fashions and floral arrangements, still filled the pages. *The Independent* reprinted an article from the *New York Times* on January 6, 1934 that reported many fashion "ins," including "old-fashioned pearl dog collars having diamond supports" (6 Jan, 1934: 6). The October 4, 1930, issue reported that the "John Allen Townleys [...] are deep in plans and preparation for a joyous year abroad" (4 Oct, 1930: 9). In 1934, Betty Ann wrote: "If there was any indication this past holiday season that hard times had struck Kansas City, it was not shown in the Christmas and New Year's cards which were so lavishly sent around by opulent citizens" (6 Jan, 1934: 4), a sentiment also expressed in 1931 (3 Jan, 1931: 17). These comments indicate that Kansas City's upper class did not completely abandon its pattern of drawing class boundaries through consumption, nor did they always feel

21 Though an estimated 80% of white-collar workers had some paid vacation time in the 1920s, the economic resources of families limited these trips. Working class families rarely had the privilege of paid time off (Drowne and Huber 2004: 252-253).

the need to provide justification for their spending in a time of national poverty.

Fashion

Women at all class levels purchased products for themselves and for their families. *The Independent* frequently reinforced this connection between consumption and women: "The very sparkle of springtime sunshine, causes every woman to feel a longing for new things--not only for personal adornment but for cheery decorations in the home" (4 Apr, 1925: 13). Upper-class women used their good taste (i.e. their cultural capital) to spend money in a way that created a class distinction. This was seen most readily through fashion, a favorite topic in *The Independent;* descriptions of women's clothing were frequent, in-depth, and lengthy:

> I repeat that in the whirl of the Muehlebach's Yuletide Tea Dance, it was a problem to recognize the dancers or to see what color the frocks were but I did notice Peggy Tourtellot wearing black velvet and her guest, Theo Sohst of New York, wearing a smart printed velvet in tones of taupe and green. Pauline Snider was in twig brown and Frances Williams, accompanied by her spouse, Winthrop, was swankily accoutered in black chiffon velvet and lace. Miss Elizabeth Gentry, who was hostess to a small group, was outstanding in a deep-winish red gown, worn with one of those fascinating tight caplike hats--of gold and pale beige feathers, and *was* it becoming! (5 Jan, 1929: 19).

It was common for the writer to list what all of the women at a party wore, down to the smallest detail. As Crane (2000) argued, “clothing was an important means of 'claiming' social status, for indicating one's actual social position in societies where small gradations in social status were taken seriously” (238). This “status claiming” can be seen in this quote from Emily Post's 1922 best-selling book, *Etiquette in*

Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home:

> In the world of smart society--in America at any rate--clothes not only represent our ticket of admission, but our contribution to the effect of a party. What makes a brilliant party? Clothes. Good clothes. A frumpy party is nothing more nor less than a collection of badly dressed persons. (540)

Fashionable clothing was a "ticket of admission" to acceptance in "smart society." Without the money needed to purchase this clothing, as well as the refined taste needed to decide on what clothes to wear, high society would likely reject a woman and her family. A 1927 advertisement for a clothes-trading store in *The Independent* highlighted the association between women's fashion and class status. A child tells her mother: "Mother, Margie's mamma said we must be awfully rich 'cause you dress so beautifully" (1 Oct, 1927: 4). Writers for *The Independent* deemed women responsible for maintaining the appearance of their class status for their entire families. An ad for the baby section at a local department store read: "This important matter of 'fashion' begins quite early in the life of the individual. Babies as well as grown-ups must bow to its dictates" (6 Jul, 1929: 3). Considering the social pressure that high society placed on women to dress fashionably, it is not surprising that upper- and middle-class women consistently spent substantially more money on their clothing than did their husbands (Crane 2000: 241).[22]

In the 1920s, upper-class women were not just consumers of high fashion;

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22 This was not the case for working-class wives, whose public appearance in fashionable clothing was less likely to make class distinctions due to their relative exclusion from the public sphere. Single working-class women who were employed, however, spent a substantial portion of their income on fashion (Crane 2000: 241).

they had the social authority to define what was stylish. As Crane (2000) argued, a top-down model of fashion applied during this period.[23] Upper-class women in the U.S. sought *haute couture,* which literally means “high sewing,” styles from such Parisian designers as Coco Chanel, and women from other classes emulated these styles.[24] *Haute couture* items were fit to the individual and sewn by hand, including hand embroidery and beadwork, making them prohibitively expensive to all but the very rich. Fashionable clothing in the 1920s highlighted a thin, boyish figure, with rising skirt lines that came just below the knee. Women bobbed their hair to fit underneath fashionable cloche hats. Mass-produced clothing became a major industry in the United States in the 1870s, and by the 1920s most clothing was mass-produced (Crane 2000: 138). These mass-produced emulations of *haute couture* styles used cheaper materials in order to make fashionable clothing available to many women. Only the very rich, who purchased the genuine *haute couture*, and the very poor, who could not afford pre-made clothing, regularly had hand-made clothing in their wardrobes in the 1920s (Drowne and Huber 2004: 96-101). Upper-class women's consumption of *haute couture* styles created class boundaries between themselves and women in other classes, who, though they could not afford these styles, recognized them as the latest in fashion.

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23 Crane contrasts this “class” model of fashion with the “consumer” model of fashion dominant today, which includes many fashion authorities and multiple styles of clothing designed for different niche markets.

24 Paris continued to dominate the world of fashion design until the 1960s, when new technology and changing marketing conditions allowed for designers from other countries to gain some prominence (Crane 2000: 132).

In the 1930s, the gulf between high fashion and popular dress widened. Many American women began to turn to department stores, fashion and movie magazines, and popular movie stars, such as Joan Crawford and Jean Harlow (a Kansas City native), for their fashion advice rather than fashion designers and high society. Women's fashion in the 1930s emphasized a curvy figure, with a slim waste, and printed fabrics became popular. Hollywood designers such as MGM's Gilbert Adrian became increasingly important in defining popular fashions, as exhibited by the title of the film, *Fashions of 1934,* starring Bette Davis and William Powell (Young and Young, 2002: 84).[25] Following such “masculine” Hollywood heroines as Marlene Dietrich, upper- and middle-class women began to wear pants at the ranches and resorts that became popular as vacation destinations (though pants remained taboo for everyday wear) (Crane 2000: 123). American fashion designers who did not want to simply imitate styles from Paris for large manufacturers of ready made clothing flocked to Hollywood to work on the latest designs for the silver screen, eventually influencing Parisian designers (Crane 2000: 139). In the 1930s, upper-class women's power to define what was fashionable diminished as Hollywood's influence rose.

This shift in symbolic power shows the inadequacy of models like Bourdieu's that only recognize one market for cultural capital.[26] Two markets for women's fashion emerged in the 1930s; for popular fashions, Hollywood became the authority.

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25 Hollywood's influence was large in Kansas City: 76 movie houses were listed in the city directory in the 1920s (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 202).

26 For further discussion of different currencies of cultural capital, see Hall (1992: 259).

For the upper class, *haute couture* from Paris continued to define high fashion. The fact that the average woman may not have recognized the value or fashionability of *haute couture* clothing did not diminish its importance in drawing social boundaries. Upper-class women may not have had the cultural authority to dictate popular fashions, but they continued to use the standard of *haute couture* styles to judge other women, drawing social boundaries around the elite. Napiers shoe store recognized upper-class women's power to define what was fashionable in a series of ads run throughout 1932. The store named certain styles of shoes after leading Kansas City society matrons and advertised these shoes using their names (2 Apr, 1932: 13; 1 Oct, 1932: 12). Napiers used the symbolic capital of upper-class women in order to sell shoes.

Criticisms of Consumption

Drawing boundaries through consumption elicited a certain amount of critique from the public, particularly during the 1930s. Men's main contribution to the reproduction of the upper-class family, their large incomes and inheritances, came under scrutiny during the Depression. Huey Long, senator and former governor of Louisiana, articulated this criticism of the upper class. Known as “Kingfish,” Long announced his “Share-Our-Wealth” campaign on the radio on February 23, 1934. This plan to redistribute wealth in the U.S. included provisions to liquidate all fortunes exceeding $3 million and to give every deserving family $4,000-5,000 so

that everyone could afford their own house, car, and radio. Long had popular support throughout the country, particularly in the Midwest and the Pacific Coast. His assassination on September 9, 1935 ended his aspirations for the presidency, but he influenced the political climate of the 1930s and made New Deal legislation seem less radical. President Roosevelt signed the Revenue Act, also known as the wealth-tax act, into law on August 30, 1935, implementing higher tax rates on the upper class and big business. This legislation seemed less radical compared to the programs outlined by Long, though Roosevelt became known as a "traitor to his class" (Cashman 1989: 183-190; Wecter 1967 (1948): 205-206). Moreover, this legislation had popular support among those who resented the extravagant incomes of the upper class. An editorial in *The Star* of Kansas City from June 1935 reasoned:

> In his taxation message President Roosevelt made a political masterstroke, even though its immediate effect may be to slow down recovery. While the existence of great hereditary fortune is probably not an important factor in the general economic structure, socially it had been an irritant. Heavy taxation of large incomes carries a popular appeal.[27]

The "large incomes" being critiqued were men's primary contribution to class reproduction.

Though the public and politicians criticized upper-class men for their fortunes, they received support from within their class. With one exception, *The Independent* did not question men's financial contribution to the family. This exception is from an article about John Pierpont Morgan's appearance before a Senate committee

27 1935. "Press Comment on President's Tax Message." *New York Times.* June 21, pg. 3.

investigating the financial state of America. The author calls "the most noted financier of them all[‘s]" appearance a "spectacle" and clearly sides with "the voice of the populace who crowded the senate chamber to denounce the thing that always talks--*money*” (1 Jul, 1933: 13). This quote reflects a desire to distance Kansas City's upper class from the kind of exploitative capitalist that came under such scrutiny during the Depression. However, this criticism was never applied closer to home. *The Independent* accepted the fact that a businessman should earn high profits and that children should inherit their parents’ fortunes, even when so many people were unemployed. For the writers of *The Independent,* one of women's contributions to the family's class status, forming class boundaries through consumption, was much more problematic than were men's high earnings.

Critiques of women's consumption appeared in *The Independent* throughout the 1920s. Several analyses of the upper class have argued that men gain prestige from the consumption of their wives, then go on to disparage them for spending so much money (Kaplan Daniels 1988: xiv; Veblen 1953; Potter 1964: 65-84; Beisel 1997: 15). This criticism was the impetus behind the formation of the Junior League in New York in 1901.[28] Debutantes were critiqued for their conspicuous consumption, so they began this volunteer organization to alleviate criticism (Kendall 2002: 119). This criticism was seen in *The Independent.* A 1929 article indicated that an otherwise happy young married couple might be in trouble: “svelte wife is

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28 Fifty young Kansas City women applied to become the 14th chapter of the Junior League in 1914 (Coleman 2006b: 48).

terribly extravagant. How is her wild buying going to affect poor loving mate? The outlook is dangerous" (5 Jan, 1929: 11). Another article discussed a book of poems, containing one "that every married man can appreciate" about a woman who "never had anything to wear": "Miss Flora's difficulties of finding a suitable costume despite her frequent trips to Paris, her large investments in all manner of clothing, is pathetic--and touching--as are so many women's difficulties, to the husband's pocketbook" (2 Jul, 1927: 20). Another article, titled "Adam adopts Eve's evil" criticized men's growing interest in fashion (1 Oct, 1927: 21). *The Independent* often portrayed women's consumption as extravagant and out of control without acknowledging the ways that drawing class boundaries through consumption benefited the upper class.

The Depression gave additional weight to critiques of upper-class women's frivolous consumption. This report on a fashion show from 1933 indicates that members of the upper class may have initially had to limit their consumption in order to avoid being perceived as insensitive to the poor:

> Jean Coventry's presentation of the new winter modes really opened something. [...] A most critical clientele has expressed real gratitude to Miss Coventry for giving Kansas City women such a superb showing--one which creates a new feeling, one which breaks the monotony of plain dressing and the lack of taste in dress, which we have suffered for three years--one which revives the 'spirit of dressing.' Nothing is too beautiful or too rich, today, for the lady of fashion. We are tired of being poor. It is not fashionable--any more. (1 Oct, 1933: 7)

This quote indicates that, in the beginning of the Depression, conspicuous

consumption might have been judged as insensitive to the suffering of other classes. The fact that plain dressing was deemed fashionable, rather than a necessary step to reduce expenses, indicates that these women were not dressing plainly because of limited financial resources. Once upper-class women "tired of being poor," they could switch back to the latest upscale fashions and again draw class boundaries through high fashion. However, critiques of women’s consumption also came from within the upper class itself. Betty Ann reported a conversation that she overheard at a local restaurant:

> Just accidentally heard, or overheard, Mrs. Blank's remark: "You probably have not noticed it, but Mrs. X. is not dressing nearly as expensively as she formerly did. Do you imagine Mr. S. has felt the depression?"
> An expression of envy pervaded Mr. Blank's countenance as he replied:
> "Oh no, my dear, he is quite as prosperous as ever. He told me, however, in confidence the other day at the Kansas City Club, that he and Mrs. X. had made up their minds to live within his income, and they seem to be keeping the agreement."
> "Well, I have always believed, " continued Mrs. Blank superciliously, "that eventually they would show themselves for what they really are--their absolute inability to meet the demands of high life in our set."
> Mr. X's teeth gritted ominously, but he said nothing. (3 Oct, 1931: 8)

In this quote, the husband was more rational and practical about finances. The wife was out of touch with reality. Neither the author nor the husband acknowledged the important class distinctions that "the demands of high life in our set" created. The writer portrayed Mrs. Blank's spending as completely frivolous and out of touch with the financial reality of 1930s America.

However, another way of framing upper-class women's consumption emerged

in *The Independent.* This view portrayed upper-class women as aware of the needs of the unemployed, fitting their consumption into their desire to be socially responsible. An April 1933 issue announced a talk given at the Woman's City Club by Isabelle Scudder Farrington, who had written a political comedy that was performed for the unemployed (1 Apr, 1933: 13). In this same issue, a discussion of the International Flower Show in New York listed some "prominent girls" who served at the tea party, but was also quick to note that "the unemployment situation was not ignored and many young women not of the holy of holies also made themselves useful" (1 Apr, 1933: 3). Not only were upper-class women aware of the needs of the unemployed, they were aware that these needs were tied to their consumption. A commentary from 1931 states:

> When Muriel Vanderbilt Church recently married Henry Delafield Phelps, she advised her friends not to send wedding gifts. She also suggested that money they would have used for that purpose, be given to the unemployed. As might have been foretold, Mrs. Church blocked the probable sale of many articles of merchandise which otherwise would have materially increased the volume of business done during the month. Besides, instead of donating the money to charity, its owners held on to it and the butcher, baker and dressmaker went without.
>
> It is sophistry of the most pernicious kind to advocate stinginess particularly when so many persons are complaining of hard times. When excessive luxury is displayed, the possible exercise of poor taste is wholly negligible compared to the harm dealt general welfare. If persons who have money decline to let go of it, the answer is obvious.
>
> Abstention from entertainment, such as the social world customarily indulges, will never rout depression. Moreover, it encourages a pretense of impecuniosity which only aggravates the situation instead of relieving it. The fact is, many seem to take delight in proclaiming their poverty when they know perfectly well, as everyone else does, that there is not a word of truth to it. (3 Oct, 1931: 15)

This quote offered a different interpretation of upper-class women's consumption during the Depression: upper-class women fueled the economy through their consumption. If the upper class did not spend money, people in other classes lost valuable customers. What is more, the "possible exercise of poor taste" was a trivial concern compared to this important boost to the economy that women could provide. From this perspective, upper-class women's consumption became wise, requiring an understanding of the economic system and a willingness to overcome silly social customs. As the earlier quote about women not wanting to dress plainly anymore indicated, these prohibitions against displaying wealth during lean times were more about public appearance than they were about saving money. The article rails against this pretense, arguing that it only "aggravates the situation." Though this did offer a positive account of women's consumption, it still did not question men's contribution to the family's class status. The source of the upper class's wealth was still not questioned: upper-class women should spend their husband's money, not convince them to give a raise to their employees.

As these accounts from *The Independent* show, the way that boundary work is represented to the public needs to align with the values of society: if consumption is celebrated, (as it was in the 1920s), it is an acceptable form of boundary work. If extreme wealth is viewed as immoral rather than as something to be emulated, as it was in the 1930s, consumption loses its validity as a way to draw class boundaries.

The political climate of society is crucial to understanding both the kinds of boundary work that are most prominent and the ways that these processes are represented to society.

Upper-Class Children: Teaching the Next Generation

Like all parents, members of Kansas City's upper class wanted their children to maintain their class status. Since they were already at the top, downward mobility was the only other option.[29] As this quote from *The Independent* shows, high society expected that upper-class children would maintain their class status from the moment they were born: “Another young lady who will doubtless make her bow some eighteen years hence is the little newcomer who arrived September 24” (4 Oct, 1930: 10). Upper-class women were primarily responsible for ensuring that their children stayed in the upper class due to their role as the primary provider of childcare.[30] It was uncommon for men to assume this responsibility, as the *Independent* reporter recounting this scene at a local restaurant made clear:

> An unusual thing happened at Musicians’ Café the other evening at the dinner hour. Two young men entered, each with a small child, one a boy, the other a girl. The two fathers solicitously sought high chairs for the tots, and after confining them safely began consultation of the menu. [...] Not a mother was to be seen in the party. (4 Oct, 1930: 3)

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29 The central importance of the family in class reproduction has been documented in several studies of the upper class (Warner and Lunt 1941: 252; Baltzell 1958: 162; Ostrander 1984: 68; Kaplan Daniels 1988; Beisel 1997; Kendall 2002).

30 Though Kansas City's high society became slightly more accepting of divorce in the 1920s, the majority of the upper class in this period was married. Married people have historically averaged 2/3 of Kansas City's upper class (Coleman 2006b: 202-204).

This "unusual" scene points to the everyday reality that women were in charge of raising upper-class children. The boundary work that upper-class women did was often closely tied to this role as mothers. Though there was a great deal of consistency in this role between the 1920s and 30s, there were also some changes in the way that upper-class women inculcated their children into the upper class in these differing economic times. One such difference was that the average number of children per upper-class family in Kansas City decreased from 2.4 in the 1920s to a low of 1.9 per family in the 1930s (Coleman 2006b: 202-204).

From a very young age, parents and peers taught upper-class children that it was normal and acceptable for their clubs, schools, and associations to be selective. By teaching their children to interact with the "right" people, and to avoid the "wrong" people, upper-class women guaranteed that their children had the social connections to maintain their class status. Upper-class women's responsibility for young children placed them in a prime position to explain and justify social organization to their kids, as shown in this 1929 quote:

> An important social leader confided to me the other day that her young son was most incensed because she refused to invite his favorite traffic cop, Tom and his wife, to a large and formal dinner party she is soon to give. It was really quite a difficult proposition to explain “why” to the little chap, who yet can’t see that Tom and Mrs. Tom wouldn’t be a wonderful addition to any party. (2 Jan, 1929: 8)

This mother was responsible for teaching her son to limit his associations to those from within his class. Upper-class mothers were responsible for teaching their

children the values that justified their class position. If successful, their children would accept the exclusivity that was necessary to guard the boundaries of the upper class.

Creating Elite Social Networks for Children

The Independent fostered these elite social networks for children through printing advertisements for summer camps, dance classes, music lessons, and boarding and day schools, where "references [were] required" (2 Jul, 1927: 18). The elite nature of these events ensured that children continued to encounter only those of their own class. An article praising Camp Cha-ton-ka approved of the fact that it was "a resort of limited number, properly organized, privately owned" (4 Apr, 1931: 9). Residential segregation also ensured that upper-class children would maintain elite social networks. In 1929-1930, 58.7% of upper-class families lived in the Country Club District of Kansas City, with another 31.2% concentrated in the Hyde Park district (Coleman 2006b: 266). These factors together produced a social bubble around upper-class children: they were raised in an environment where exclusion was the norm, and social capital was high.

Another way that upper-class parents ensured that their children met the "right" people was through enrolling them in private schools.[31] As this summary of

31 Secondary education was becoming more common for America's middle class in this period. In 1919, Kansas City's school district registered 7,000 students in its high schools; this number was up to 19,000 by 1930. Researcher Thomas Ditmar found that few of these new high school students were from the working class (Montgomery and Kasper 1999: 196).

the school patterns of Kansas City's elite children during the 1920s and 1930s shows, this was a common strategy among Kansas City's upper class:

Upper-Class Boys in Private Schools: 1914-1945

UU= Upper-upper-class; N=170 for 1914-1929; N=228 for 1930-1945

LU=Lower-upper-class; N=695 for 1914-1929; N=795 for 1930-1945

	1914-1929: UU	1914-1929: LU	1930-1945: UU	1930-1945: LU
Elite Boarding School	25.3%	4.2%	19.3%	1.0%
Other Boarding School or Military Academy	19.4	6.1	15.8	4.9
Elite Kansas City Private Day School	33.5	15.5	36.8	23.2
Total in Private School:	78.2%	25.8%	74.9%	29.1%

(Coleman 2006b: 280)

Upper-Class Girls in Private Schools: 1914-1945

UU= Upper-upper-class; N=177 for 1914-1929; N=237 for 1930-1945

LU=Lower-upper-class; N=620 for 1914-1929; N=830 for 1930-1945

	1914-1929: UU	1914-1929: LU	1930-1945: UU	1930-1945: LU
Elite Boarding School	8.5%	0.8%	4.2%	0.4%
Other Boarding School	8.5	2.6	5.5	0.6
Elite Kansas City Private Day School	72.3	34.0	78.1	43.5
Total in Private School:	89.3%	36.4%	87.8%	44.5%

(Coleman 2006b: 281)

This picture reveals a number of patterns. First, more boys than girls went away to go

to school, though there was a shift toward cheaper private day schools during the Depression. The ability of elite parents to foster national social networks for their children (particularly their sons) was reduced with the strained finances of the 1930s. Second, more girls than boys attended private schools, especially private day schools in Kansas City.[32] These elite schools created strong local social networks for girls.[33] Third, there was a large difference (52.4% for boys and 52.9% for girls) between the percentage of upper-upper-class children and lower-upper-class children who attended private schools between 1914-1929. This indicates the quality of the social networks gained at these schools: since most students were from top families, children were guaranteed to make the "right" kind of friends at school. While the difference continued to be large between 1930-1945 (45.8% for boys and 43.3% for girls), the exclusionary role that upper-class private schools played decreased. More lower-upper-class children enrolled in local private day schools, opening up these social networks. The value of private schooling can be seen in the rate at which the Kansas City Establishment accepted these lower-upper class children: historically, they were more than twice as likely to gain acceptance as their lower-upper class peers who attended public schools (Coleman 2006b: 145). As with many other elite

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32 The Country Day School (founded 1910) and Pembroke (1925) were prominent private schools for Kansas City's elite boys, while Barstow (founded 1884), Sunset Hill (1913), and Notre Dame de Sion were popular choices for upper-class girls (Coleman 2006b: 144)

33 These strong local social networks and the cultural knowledge taught at elite schools were contributing factors to the fact that, among Kansas City families in 1954-55, a woman's education level was a better predictor of family income and social status than her husband's education (Coleman 1971: ix).

institutions during the Depression, upper-class schools opened their ranks slightly in order to incorporate the new money needed to remain financially solvent.

Along with private schools, upper-class women enrolled their children in a variety of classes in order to teach them to value cultural capital and give them the requisite cultural vocabulary to fit in with upper-class social events. This training began early; a story about a pre-kindergarten dancing class given at the Kansas City Athletic Club stated: “These classes are such fun for the kiddies and the early training is so valuable” (4 Oct, 1930: 11). *The Independent* featured “Instructional” sections in many of the magazines that advertised for a variety of private schools, dance classes, and piano and voice lessons. The value of these skills was stressed in this Vose Piano ad: “The Richest Child is Poor without Musical Training” (5 Oct, 1929: 7). Without a basic knowledge of art, fine food, music, and world events, these children would not be able to seamlessly enter upper-class social life. This cultural knowledge was particularly important for upper-class girls, since they would need these skills as adults in order to participate in arts-based volunteer groups, host social functions, and inculcate their own children into the norms of the upper class. The feminine nature of cultural capital was apparent in this ad for a $1,000 Vose piano: "Grandmother had one, Mother had one, Daughter wants one!" (5 Jul, 1924: 4). Ads for girls' schools in *The Independent* reflected the desire to give young women the cultural knowledge they would need as adults. One ad for St. Teresa College claimed that it was the place where your daughter could “become a poised, cultured, capable

woman ready to meet the demands of this exacting age" (5 Jul, 1930: 16). Young women could stay at home or go on a Round the World Travel School, where they visited all of the cultural sites of Europe with paid instructors. With this training, upper-class girls could grow up to capably teach their own children the value of cultural capital and participate fully in social events.

Marriage

Upper-class women were also responsible for their children's successful marriages within the upper class.[34] A 1929 article recalled a classic success story: "A very lovely deb of last year, with considerable of these worldly goods, is reported enamored of a young out-of-towner whose social position and bank roll are on a par with hers" (2 Feb, 1929: 13). Since children often drew their marriage partners from the elite social networks created for them by their parents (especially their mothers), *The Independent* often held upper-class women responsible for their children's marriages.[35] This led some women to promote their children as potential marriage partners. For example, Matty wonders, "If *Mamma's* persistent attempts to promote and flaunt her son aren't a bit irksome to him" (2 Jan, 1932: 11). *The Independent*

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34 Coleman's (1971) data from the 1950s suggests that Kansas City's upper class was largely successful in keeping marriages within the upper classes: from the 105 families from which these data were available, half of the marriages were between members of the same class, while among the 48% that were between class lines, only 4% of marriages united two people from classes not immediately adjacent (247).

35 Upper-class women's own social networks and volunteer activities can also directly affect their children's marriage prospects. For example, Kendall (2002: 48) showed how a certain number of volunteer hours were required of a mother before her daughter could be selected as a debutante.

also held upper-class women responsible for their children's failed marriages, as seen in this reprimand to a mother who had three divorced sons: "Their trouble, it seems, is that mother failed to teach her sons rightfully when they were young" (4 Jul, 1931: 8). This responsibility was rewarded when children married within the upper class, leading Meddlesome Matty to ask, “If there is any pride like that of the doting mamma whose ugly duckling of a daughter has just acquired a worthwhile husband” (5 Oct, 1929: 11). *The Independent* blamed and praised upper-class women for their children's marriage choices, showing the importance of this aspect of mothering for the reproduction of the upper class.

The Independent also chastised those who did not marry within their class. In a snide remark about an anonymous newlywed, Meddlesome Matty wondered: "If you know that after all these years she is stooping to wed one whose name is missing from ossified archives of the Social Register" (2 Jul, 1932: 9). A story that reminded domestics of their inferior social status ended with the warning: "Just let [the domestic or the sales clerk] make sheep’s eyes at the son of the house, and see what happens”(5 Jul, 1930: 15). This warning suggests that mothers were aware of the possibility of a "bad" marriage and were willing to go to great lengths to prevent one. These fears came to fruition in this 1930 story. *The Independent* reported that a controversy erupted in New York over the “inclusion of the name of a young woman who married the son of William M. Willock, a Croesus of New York" in the *Social Register*. This was so controversial because

> she had been employed as a servant in the Willock household, prior to annexing herself more substantially thereto. [...] Columns have been written commending the erstwhile housemaid on the apparent betterment of her status socially and otherwise, but by implication it is taken for granted that compilers of this awesome little volume, grudgingly included Mrs. Willock's name with that of her husband, but in ensuing editions both will be omitted. (4 Jan, 1930: 8)

This story highlights the importance of marriage to a person's class status. The son's choice of marriage partners has ensured his exclusion from high society. It also illustrates the power that the upper class had in deciding who was included. When obvious social boundaries could be drawn through such things as the *Social Register,* it was easy to exclude people and gave the upper class a great deal of control over who was let in.

Critiques of Upper-Class Mothers

In addition to taking responsibility for their children's future class status, many articles in The Independent also mentioned upper-class women's responsibility to provide direct care to their families. A snippet from 1934 reads: "Women who used to aim to be good wives and mothers are devoting a lot of time these days to being good sports and bridge players" (6 Jan, 1934: 6). Another story relayed a complaint from "an outraged grandmother" who was upset with her daughter-in-law, "a dizzy blonde whose thought revolve[d] exclusively around social functions." The children were primarily taken care of by a nursemaid, with brief visits from the mother. The grandmother reported that the mother "stayed about ten minutes and as

she dashed off her first born lisped, 'By-bye, mumsie, see you soon'" (2 Feb, 1929: 12). This story highlights two things. First, upper-class women must rely on paid help in order to perform the work of class reproduction. In 1937, Fortune reported that 70% of the upper class had some form of paid help around the house (Palmer 1989: 8). Upper-class women would not be able to raise children and meet the high social demands expected of them without this help.[36] Second, it shows that, while upper-class society expected its women to create elite social networks for their families, they also criticized them for turning over reproductive labor to paid help. The norms of their group held them to a double standard: they must ensure the class position of their children through boundary work, but they also must provide the direct care that is expected of all women. Since they did not have time to do both, they faced criticism.

Conclusion

This analysis has shown that boundary work is historically contingent. Though the story of boundary work in Kansas City in the 1920s and 30s was one more of continuity than of change, Kansas City's upper class had to adjust to the changing culture, values, and economy of the United States following the stock

36 The same study reported that 42% of the upper-middle class, 14% of the lower-middle class, and 6% of the lower class were able to hire some paid help. The division of household work among women has historically been dictated by race and class, with privileged white women taking the role of manager over poor women, who took on the most physically taxing jobs (Palmer 1989). Glenn (1992) documented how this racial division of reproductive labor can still be seen in the service industry.

market crash of 1929. Bourdieu's theory, which emphasizes the relatively stable nature of systems of class and gender hierarchy, cannot account for the shift in boundary work that these social changes precipitated. In her critique of Bourdieu's theory of gender, Butler (1997) argued that Bourdieu does not give adequate recognition to agency, and therefore treats gender as a static category (Butler 1997: 147). By closely following the ways that Kansas City's upper class drew boundaries against other people and the way that *The Independent* represented this boundary work through a particularly vivid boom/bust economic cycle, I have shown the need for historically-aware accounts of class reproduction. By piecing this study together with other accounts of the upper class, such as Baltzell's (1958) portrait of Philadelphia prior to World War II or Beisel's (1997) account of the Northeast in the Victorian era, we can develop a more powerful and nuanced understanding of the differences and similarities in class reproduction across time and region.

Equally important to understand is how the upper class and society as a whole values the different contributions of men and women to class reproduction. During the period of my study, men were in charge of contributing financial resources to the family, while upper-class women drew boundaries through exclusive elite social networks, consumption, and by inculcating children into upper-class life. Although Bourdieu talks about families, Beisel argues that he fails to acknowledge important power differences between members of the upper-class family (1997: 215). We get some glimpses into this power struggle in the pages of *The Independent,* which

routinely devalued upper-class women's contribution to their families' class status by trivializing their volunteer work and club activities, criticizing the necessity of turning over childrearing to paid help, and portraying women's spending as extravagant. The very nature of the magazine and the names of its authors highlighted the petty and gossipy side of upper-class women's social worlds. The systematic devaluing of women's labor extends to the upper class, making the boundary work that upper-class women do seem trivial and inconsequential. As I have shown in this paper, petty gossip and fashionable clothing are anything but inconsequential: these things can close the gates of high society just as easily as lacking financial resources. Upper-class women's contributions to class reproduction are just as important as those of upper-class men, and the impulse to devalue upper-class women's contributions only works to hide the nature of how class privileges are passed on. We need to treat upper-class women's labor seriously if we are to understand the ways that class is reproduced in our society.

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