

# Downplaying Themselves, Upholding Men's Status: Women's Deference to Men in Wealthy Families



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*Studies often portray status as a position, but status is also a process sustained by social and cultural mechanisms. These social processes can create inequality in men's and women's economic positions. Families are key economic institutions, but the processes involved in managing family wealth are poorly understood. Drawing on in-depth interviews with twenty-five women (and eleven husbands) in families with a median net worth of \$27.5 million, I find that wives report general ignorance about wealth (although, on deeper probing, women often have more expertise than it appears on first glance). Second, women state they are disengaged with the economic realm. Third, the formation of marriages where women would have vastly more economic power than their future husbands are deeply stigmatized. Despite formidable wealth, in these marriages, women emphasized their lack of economic expertise and engagement. This gender "stickiness" contributed to status inequality in the economic sphere.*

**Keywords:** gender, wealth, status, family, economic, elite

In the study of social status, many conceptualize status as a position ("he is a judge"). Less attention has been paid to status as a process embedded in broader cultural schemas and cultural expectations (but see Ridgeway and Markus 2022, this issue, as well as Fiske and

Markus 2012; Lamont 1992; Lamont et al. 2014)). Yet, as Pierre Bourdieu taught us, routine social interactions are structured and yet at the same time fluid in what is termed a "logic of practice" (1977, 1990). This means that a full account of status—the focus of this special double issue—

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needs to examine the social and cultural processes that sustain these status positions and shape perceptions of the status hierarchy (see also Accominotti, Lynn, and Sauder 2022; Correll et al. 2017; Leicht 2022; Valentino 2022, this issue; Benjamin 2022, this issue).

The importance of conceptualizing status as a set of processes is key in the realm of economic institutions. In economic institutions, the social and cultural processes undergirding economic inequality are prone to being obscured. After all, the family is decisively an economic institution, but the affective character of the family often takes center stage. Of course, a vast literature addresses important family economic matters such as gender and labor-force participation, earnings, and household labor.<sup>1</sup> Yet relational dynamics, such as the ways in which family members claim expertise or simply disengage from economic matters, have gained less attention. These gendered forms of relational work, however, may be important in shaping familial status hierarchies and control over family resources.

Wealthy families are a particularly useful setting in which to examine the social processes that sustain economic positions because, by definition, considerable wealth is involved (Gilding 2005; Hansen and Toft 2021; Kendall 2002, 2008; O'Brien, 2021; Schimpfössl 2018; Sherman 2019; Toft and Friedman 2021). In families with millions of dollars, the ample supply of wealth might theoretically allow for more flexibility and fluidity in actions men and women take in economic realms. (See Cousins, Khan, and Mears 2018 on the value of studying elites, as well as Keister 2014 and Kendall 2008.) Few studies have been undertaken; Susan Osterlander's classic work, *Women of the Upper Class*, was completed some forty years ago (1984). In the ensuing decades, women's labor-force participation, earnings, and political

roles shifted considerably (Perry-Jenkins and Gerstel 2020; Wharton 2015). Luna Glucksberg (2018) highlights the labor needed to manage elite women's complex lives, but does not take up the issue of their expertise in family economic matters.<sup>2</sup>

In this article, drawing on in-depth interviews with twenty-five wealthy women and eleven of their partners, I conclude an elaborate set of social and cultural processes that helps sustain husbands' positions as key economic agents within the family. I make three points. First, I find that men are deeply knowledgeable about family economic matters while their wives perform levels of general ignorance (although, on deeper probing, women often have more expertise than it appears at first glance). These social processes, where women shun gathering expertise in key areas, sustain inequality in men's and women's positions as economic actors given that men have more economic expertise. Second, women report levels of disengagement and discomfort with the economic realm but men appear animated, excited, and comfortable with economic matters. Third, the inequality in economic status appears so formidable as to suggest a stigma to forming marriages where women would have vastly more economic wealth than their husbands.<sup>3</sup> Respondents report significant social costs to these unions; some have broken them off precisely over issues of relative economic position. This pattern of marital avoidance limits the possibilities of wealthy women having more economic power than their husbands. Taken together, women and men report that women have subordinated economic positions in families relative to men in terms of expertise, engagement, and in some cases economic power. Given that the women are extremely competent, particularly in running their complex family lives, the results suggest ongoing

1. See, among others, Bertrand, Kamenica, and Pan 2015; Smock and Schwartz 2020; Tichenor 2005; Yavorsky et al. 2022. For workplace and gender, see Correll et al. 2017, 2020; Gonalons-Pons et al. 2021; Smith 2002; Stone and Lovejoy 2019; Wharton 2015; Williams, Berdhal, and Vandello 2016; see also Cooper 2014; Rao 2020.

2. There is a vast literature in the area of consumption, including the ways in which status signals influence consumption. See Warde 2015. For a more general discussion of the meaning of money, see Zelizer 2017. For general discussions of growing inequality see Saez and Zucman 2020; for attitudes toward the wealthy, see McCall 2013.

3. On how women's higher earnings are associated with lower likelihood of marriage, see Bertrand et al. 2015.

importance of broader traditional cultural schema surrounding gender as mechanisms sustaining the position of men as the higher-status, key economic actors in the family. In addition to changes in the legal realm and other structures (Bessière 2019), efforts to reduce economic inequality in family life would require rethinking the broader cultural and social pressure regarding men's and women's economic involvement.

## LITERATURE

Status is an important dimension of daily life, shaping countless aspects of our social world. As Cecilia Ridgeway and Hazel Markus (2022, this issue) write, cultural schemas are key: "The status process is governed by a cultural schema." Here, Ridgeway and Markus focus on "implicit norms for allocating status based on perceived value to the group." They note everchanging "status beliefs about what types of people are worthier and more competent than others" (2). Although status has more than one element, here I focus on status as an "evaluative hierarchy in which one person is more respected, deferred to, and influential than the other" (Ridgeway and Correll 2006, 431).

Status hierarchies about gender are particularly powerful. After all, evidence of punishment if women and men violate gender norms is considerable. Studies of the workplace reveal that women are harshly judged for being proactive, being agentic, and showing leadership.<sup>4</sup> Despite more limited pertinent research, studies also show men are also sharply criticized for "behaving modestly," leading to the conclusion that gender rules reinforce gender power differences by constraining men to behave in ways consistent with high-status people while prohibiting women from high-status displays (Moss-Racusin, Phelan, and Rudman 2010, 148).

The impact of cultural beliefs can be powerful. For example, countries have differing cultural views on the norm of men being the key economic provider. Pilar Gonalons-Pons and Markus Gangl (2021) show that countries with more traditional gender cultural beliefs have

higher divorce rates when men are unemployed than countries with less traditional cultural beliefs. Thus cultural gender norms clearly place economic pressure on family relationships. Extensive quantitative research has also documented key aspects of family members' economic dynamics such as the largely negative impact of women earning more money than their husbands on the likelihood of marriage, men's participation in household chores, marital satisfaction, and divorce (Bertrand, Kamenica, and Pan 2015; Schwartz and Gonalons-Pon 2016; Tichenor 2005). The research on professionals' unemployment is also striking. For example, as Aliya Rao (2020) convincingly shows, women who are the primary breadwinners at home are strongly urged by their husbands to focus on domestic issues and not to emphasize their job search to reenter the workforce. By contrast, men's unemployment is considered a family crisis and family members treat men as trespassers in their own homes, pressuring them to resume their economic contributions. Relatedly, Marianne Cooper's (2014) ethnographic study of families in the Silicon Valley also highlights how women had more responsibility and control over economic resources in the working-class families, but as the families became wealthier, men were very powerful in managing the economic realm. In short, gender relations can be powerful in framing men's and women's family dynamics around economic issues. Wealthy families provide a particularly valuable case to explore these issues because the level of wealth offers family members more options than in many families.

## THE ROLE OF WEALTH

We know that wealth appears to have an independent impact on family life, that is, above and beyond income (for a review, see Keister and Moller 2000). Most research in the social sciences, however, focuses on income. Other work describes a pattern of gender inequality in amounts of wealth (Chang 2010; Ruel and Hauser 2013). We do not have enough studies of how men and women manage the family's wealth or develop expertise around the family's

4. For a discussion, see, among others, Smith 2002; Perry-Jenkins and Gerstel 2020.

net worth. As noted, signs are also evident of the distinctive nature of gendered family relations in the upper class. Susan Ostrander's classic 1984 work, *Women of the Upper Class*, shows the subordination of women to their husbands in crucial ways including in the extensive role of women's philanthropic work, which assists in the perpetuation of the class (see also Daniels 1988).

Rachel Sherman's work (2019) illuminates how high-income and wealthy couples navigate consumption by showing how wealthy wives sometimes hide expenditures from their husbands as well as tensions in couples undertaking a home renovation. She finds that in couples with inheritance, money was usually managed by the inheritor, male or female. Thus she suggests that it is the inheritance path, rather than gender, that creates expertise and control over money. Still, she also notes that when the woman is the inheritor and the man the partner, tension is common. Her study is deeply valuable but focuses primarily on consumption and expenditures and less on the level of knowledge, expertise, or detailed information about net worth. Nor does Sherman take up the question of how wealth might impede the formation of unions.<sup>5</sup> In addition, whereas most studies look at the viewpoint of one person only, analysis that involves interviews with both partners in a marriage is helpful to discern the level of agreement or disagreement on foundational issues.

In short, evidence of gender shaping key aspects of daily lives is powerful. As the authors of a study of class and gender in France pointed out, "The reproduction of the gender order plays out in the processes of the conservation and transmission of wealth which are at the heart of different social classes. Reciprocally, the reproduction of the class order rests on processes of the enrichment of men and the impoverishment of women. At a moment when family wealth increasingly determines the so-

cial status of individuals, inequalities between men and women can't be addressed without attacking inequalities of class, but the society of class will not be abolished without reversing the order of gender."<sup>6</sup>

#### METHODOLOGY

Members of the upper class are notoriously hard to recruit for interviews (Hertz and Imber 1995; Sherman 2019). I used "the strength of weak ties" to recruit respondents, describing the study as focusing on "the blessings and challenges of being financially comfortable." Once asked (that is, after someone asked a friend to pass along the potential respondent's contact information to me for a brief phone call), approximately 20 percent of high-wealth individuals agreed to be in the study. During a subsequent phone call, I described the study, offered to give potential respondents a report of my findings at the end of the study, and promised confidentiality through extensive measures. After I spoke with them on the telephone, all of the respondents agreed. My status as a late middle-age, female sociologist in an elite institution may have influenced the recruitment, but my impression is that the respondents agreed as a favor to the person who vouched for me or out of a desire to talk about something very much on their minds but for which forums for discussion are few. Given the Survey of Consumer Finance has a response rate of 12 percent for high-net-worth respondents, the response rate, though not ideal, is comparable to other research (Bricker et al. 2015). The sample draws on families living across the United States, and the sources of their money include manufacturing, finance, retail, technology, and real estate. To protect the confidentiality of the respondents, I have situated them in a different state and somewhat altered the nature of the businesses and other identifying details. All names are pseudonyms.

5. For a study of the role of legal professionals in creating "reverse accounting" in managing inheritances and divorce settlements in France, which generally favored men over women, see Bessière 2019.

6. The quote is from Joan Scott's 2020 review of the book *Le Genre du capital: Comment la famille reproduit les inégalités* by Céline Bessière and Sibylle Gollac. The quote is from page 280 of the book. An English translation, by Juliette Rogers, titled *The Gender of Capital: How Families Perpetuate Wealth Inequality*, is forthcoming from Harvard University Press in February 2023.

This article focuses particularly on my interviews with twenty-five women (table 1). I also include interviews with ten spouses and one cohabitating male partner of these women. In addition, I report on two additional (conceptually relevant) interviews with wealthy men. The total sample is of thirty-nine wealthy individuals including both people in eleven couples (table 1). The net worth ranged up to \$150 million, but the median net worth was \$27.5 million. Still, several had lower wealth, in part because they had given significant amounts to philanthropy. All of the respondents are heterosexual except two single women who are lesbians. In the sample of women as a whole, one is Latina, one is Indian American, one is Iranian American, and the rest are white.<sup>7</sup> Most of the women are married (table 1). Except for one woman in her nineties, all of the women have a college degree and many have advanced degrees in law, business, or nonprofit management. The women have a range of political beliefs; more are Democrats, but some are Republicans. Eight of the women were recruited through a network of people connected to a group of adults where politically liberal members seek to talk openly about their wealth and be very philanthropic. In most cases, the women are children or spouses of the person who earned or inherited the money. In three cases, women contributed significantly to the business. As I explain, I interviewed multiple family members of a white Republican family (the Jansens) who have a manufacturing business in the Northeast; I also have collected documents revealing the assets of this family.

I conducted most of the interviews in the respondent's home in a face-to-face interview that lasted around two hours or longer. In five cases, however, the interviews took place via Zoom. In the interviews, I began by asking about the family they grew up in, memories of

money as a child, how they made the money (if they made it), spousal dynamics around money, plans for bequeathing money, and philanthropy. Early in the interview, I asked questions for direct figures (such as their salary for their first job, the cost of their first house); adding these monetary figures into the interview early on appeared to facilitate a franker discussion about wealth. A professional service transcribed interviews; the accuracy of the transcription was verified by reviewing the audio and reading the transcript, and the interview was deidentified by changing the names of the people, institutions (such as colleges), and locations. After the research team developed a coding scheme, research assistants, who signed confidentiality agreements, worked with deidentified interviews to code the interviews using Atlas.ti. In the data analysis process, I continued to read and reread the interviews, write memos, create data matrices, and search for disconfirming evidence (Lareau 2021).

#### FINDINGS: ECONOMIC EXPERTISE

Gender shaped the ways in which women and men engaged with economic issues. Rather than sharing their economic knowledge, married women often immediately asserted their ignorance with economic issues. Even if women had active careers, they proclaimed themselves to be much less engaged than their husbands on financial matters. Gender norms appeared to be quite powerful. Women expected their husbands to manage the finances as they managed the child rearing and the home.<sup>8</sup>

Interviews revealed women who reported that they lacked knowledge and expertise. They insisted on their incompetence (“I am not good at this”). Because these women annually signed tax returns that clearly stated their family income, and they sometimes worked on family projects or in the family foundation, their

7. I interviewed two wealthy African American men who have a net worth of \$25 million and \$100 million, respectively, but I have not yet interviewed their wives because of the impact of the pandemic on data collection (for race and wealth, see Shapiro 2004; Sherwood 2010).

8. In the interviews, the women spoke at great length, with pleasure and excitement, about their children, their homes, their meals, and other aspects of their roles as family caretakers. This warm embrace of motherhood contrasted with their vague, disinterested approach to economic matters, but it is also outside the scope of this paper. See, among others, Blair-Loy 2009; Nomaguchi and Milkie 2020.

**Table 1.** Women in Study by Characteristics

Name	Wealth Origins (I = inherited; U = upwardly mobile; M = mixed, inherited, and made)	Source of Money	Race	Family Net Worth (in millions) <sup>a</sup>	Age	Marital Status <sup>b</sup>	Prenuptial Contract? <sup>c</sup>	Interviewed Spouse?	Education	Children	Liberal Organization
1 Sara Cramer	I	mother	white	16	35	single (lesbian)	n/a	no	graduate school	0	yes
2 Tammy Dawson	I	own business with hus- band	white	100	64	married	no	no	bachelor's	2	yes
3 Deborah Haberman <sup>d</sup>	I	father	white		53	married		no	bachelor's	4	no
4 Julie Halperin	I	parents	white	5.5	67	cohabitating	n/a	yes	bachelor's	1	yes
5 Maci Hartman <sup>e</sup>	I	father	white	3	48	single	n/a	n/a	graduate school	0	yes
6 Rachel Heimowitz <sup>f</sup>	I	father, hus- band	white	5	45	married		no	bachelor's	2	no
7 Mary Hirsch	I	father	white	50	69	divorced (lesbian)	no	n/a	master's	2	yes
8 Abby Jansen	M	husband	white	110	38	married	yes	yes	bachelor's	2	no
9 Emily Jansen	M	husband	Latinx	185	39	married	yes	yes	bachelor's	2	no
10 Karla Jansen	M	husband	white	35	56	married	refused	yes	graduate school	2	no
11 Lettie Jansen	M	husband	white	20	84	married	no	yes	bachelor's	5	no
12 Rebecca Katz	I	husband	white	100	61	married	refused	yes	bachelor's	4	no
13 Jaime Magnone <sup>g</sup>	I	father	white	1	50	never married (remote)		n/a	graduate school	1	no
14 Ellie Mahler	U	own business with hus- band	white	50	90	widowed	no	no	high school	1	no
15 Nancy Natha	I	father and husband	white	50	60	married		no	graduate school	2	no

(continued)

**Table 1.** (continued)

Name	Wealth Origins (I = inherited; U = upwardly mobile; M = mixed, inherited, and made)	Source of Money	Family Net Worth (in millions) <sup>a</sup>			Marital Status <sup>b</sup>	Preuptial Contract? <sup>c</sup>	Interviewed Spouse?	Education	Children	Liberal Organization
			Race	Age	Net Worth						
16 Darlene Norton	U	husband	white	38	60	married		yes	master's	0	no
17 Susan Proctor <sup>h</sup>	U	husband	white	11	65	married	no	yes	bachelor's	3	no
18 Tracey Rogers	U	own business with hus- band	white	13.5	50	married	no	yes	graduate school	4	no
19 Diane Samuels	M	husband	white	70	72	widowed	no	n/a	graduate school	3	no
20 Pam Saunders	U	husband	white	6.5	73	widowed	no	n/a	bachelor's	2	no
21 Peyton Steadman	I	father	white	15	26	single	n/a	planned	graduate school	0	no
22 Nan Tam	U	work	Indian, US citizen	9	63	married		yes	graduate school	2	no
23 Sophia Telford <sup>i</sup>	I	father	white	5	66	married		no	bachelor's	0	yes
24 Karen Thompson	I	father	white	40	57	divorced	yes	n/a	graduate school	1	yes
25 Heather Tullman	I	husband	white	150	52	married	no	yes	master's	2	no

Source: Author's tabulations.

<sup>a</sup> Median = \$27.5 million.

<sup>b</sup> Single 3; divorced 2; widowed 3; married 16; cohabitating 1.

<sup>c</sup> Prenuptial 3; no prenuptial 12; don't know 7; single 3.

<sup>d</sup> Interview not completed; respondent willing to complete the interview in the future.

<sup>e</sup> Gave away approximately \$2 million.

<sup>f</sup> Will inherit \$30 to \$50 million.

<sup>g</sup> Will likely inherit about \$20 million. Trust pays child's private school tuition.

<sup>h</sup> Net worth estimate includes the \$5 million exclusively controlled family foundation.

<sup>i</sup> Will inherit around \$1 to \$2 million, gave away \$1.3 million.

avowed lack of basic information was striking.<sup>9</sup> Although they were proud of their husbands, the women denied knowing even the rudiments of the family's economic position. By contrast, in their interviews, men were extremely forthcoming about the details of their net worth, the wide variety of assets they held, and their strategies for maximizing wealth in the future.<sup>10</sup>

Many women did not know the actual details of the families' economic situation or, if they knew anything, it was vague rather than detailed. Couples often had differing views on the net worth. As part of the study, I interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Jansen, both in their eighties, and their three sons, who were in their late fifties, as well as the three wives of the sons.<sup>11</sup> The Jansen family had moved the business, estimated to be worth between \$50 and \$100 million, into an irrevocable trust in the names of the children. The son, Tom Jansen, managed the business and the trusts; the father, Jerry Jansen, no longer had control. This decision, which had been made a number of years earlier (when the estate tax kicked in at \$5.4 million rather than the current \$11.8 million), greatly reduced their net worth. Still, Mrs. Jansen, in her mid-eighties, was less knowledgeable than her husband when asked, in separate interviews, their net worth today.

LETTIE: Well we've given away so much to avoid the death tax. That we each have, four million or something.

JERRY: Our net worth, I say it's around, around \$12 million plus or minus a couple either way.

Mrs. Jansen's combined figure of \$8 million was dramatically lower than her husband's. Because Mr. Jansen provided extremely detailed

information and also shared written records, I concluded that his estimate is correct.

Tom Jansen, who manages the business and the trust, also provided detailed records. As he and all members of the family pointed out, the business is a private business. The value of it is hard to discern. (If it were put up for sale, the value would of course be more clear.) They estimate it as worth between \$50 and \$100 million. Because one adult child declined his portion, the business assets were divided among four and estimated to be around \$12.4 to \$25 million each. In addition, Tom Jansen had made significant money in his brother's business as well as his own real estate deals. He shared the records of all of his assets. The value of the assets depends on the sale as well as how the investments do over time (for example, in the stock market or investments such as buildings they have bought). He provided a conservative measure of his total net worth:

ANNETTE: And what's your net worth right now, ball park?

TOM: Somewhere between fifty and a hundred million.

His wife, Abby, however, who signed IRS [Internal Revenue Service] tax forms every year, gave a much more confused answer:

ANNETTE: And do you know now how much the assets are?

ABBY: I do.

ANNETTE: And what would you put them at?

ABBY: Well, it depends on how they get evaluated. And it also depends if you count the inheritance once Jerry and Lettie pass away. But it's somewhere between \$25 and \$35 million. Not counting the inheritance. \$35, I think, is counting it [the inheritance].

9. On the extensive loopholes and elaborate arrangements to tax liability and thus the tax forms, which cover income, often obscuring actual wealth, see Shiffer-Sebba 2021.

10. It is difficult to see a theoretical reason why women would be less forthcoming than men. In addition, women often revealed very personal information including their worries about their children, tensions with their family of origin and their in-laws, and other life challenges. Thus, though certainty is elusive, the details women provide in other parts of the interview gave me more confidence in the data. In addition, this pattern is consistent with theories that emphasize the centrality of gender performance in social interaction.

11. One daughter has a very serious illness; the other daughter died, as an adult, in a car accident.

Abby is correct that the assets depend on how the business is valued (“evaluated”), but the figure she gives is significantly lower than that of her husband’s report. Furthermore, her husband saw her as a great resource for him in listening to him and supporting him, but said outright that she did not understand certain aspects of their finances: “[I’m] very open about everything, and Abby, my wife is one of my best supporters and listeners. Like, remember I said I work at home? And I run things by her. She mostly just, doesn’t understand completely, but she’s a great supporter.” Despite his appreciation of his wife’s support, his comment that she “doesn’t understand completely” stresses her lack of expertise. Instead, in their marriage, their interactions sustained the husband’s status as the economic expert in the family.

Another brother, Nick, has started a business, sold it, and earned income from the sale. He was also trying to start another business that he hoped in twenty years would be worth “billions.” As true for many respondents, ascertaining the net worth was complex because it included the family business, assets from the business he sold, his two houses (which we had discussed earlier in the interview), and other monies he had inherited. But, like many other men, Nick did not deny having expertise about the amount; the issue was how to compute it: “It’s hard to say exactly, of course, because a lot of my wealth is in this manufacturing business, which is privately held, not liquid, and what it’s worth is what someone’s willing to pay for it. You know, and I have other things that I own and other companies that I own.”

All told, his total net worth was between \$22 and \$36 million, most of which is not liquid. His wife, however, who has a law degree and provided extremely personal information about her challenges growing up and other intimate issues, simply could not answer the question about their net worth. She repeatedly indicated that she simply did not know.

The third brother, Davey Jansen, had started and sold a business. He gave an estimate of \$185 as his net worth. His wife, Emily, gave a figure that, though not identical, was close: “Over the years, I’ve learned those things. I think, at the time, 2014, when I asked Dave, I think his estimate was about \$160, \$165. I don’t

know what it is now, but \$175 or \$80, I don’t know.” Emily also downplayed her expertise, saying twice, “I don’t know.” The other three wives differed wildly from their husbands’ reports or were unable to estimate.

Other couples had a similar pattern of having capable women deny knowledge of the economic situation. For example, Kirk and Tracey Rogers are in their late forties and renovate homes. They benefit from the 2012 law in Puerto Rico where personal income from capital gains, interests, and dividends are not taxed. Before moving to Puerto Rico, Mrs. Rogers was the primary wage earner. At one point, she supervised more than four hundred people. She sees herself as an active partner, and she works long hours renovating houses. She admits, though, that she simply doesn’t know their wealth. Although she was very animated at points in the interview and provided a great deal of detail, such as about the skimpy outfits women wore around the island, she did not know the actual amount of their wealth. When discussing their situation five years earlier, for example, she immediately said in so many words that she wouldn’t know.

ANNETTE: And do you know what your net worth was then?

TRACEY: I mean, I wouldn’t know. I’ll be honest with you, I don’t track it like him. . . . I do investments and I’m all in that, but he knows where we are financially. He keeps his spreadsheets.

In saying that they are “his spreadsheets,” Mrs. Rogers saw the expertise on their net worth as in the purview of her husband. This was also the case about their current net worth: “I don’t know how much money we have. I know we have a lot more now. Kirk knows to the penny probably, I think he told me we’re closer to between around \$15 to \$20 million, I don’t know.”

When probed more deeply in the interview, Mrs. Rodgers could assess the value of their various assets, but her immediate response was to insist that she was not knowledgeable. In this way, she has a pattern of deference that sustains her husband’s higher status in the economic realm.

Her husband provided a similar portrait: “She’s operations. We’re very similar except I’m the one who sources the deals and I analyze them for the dollars, and then she analyzes them for ‘Nobody’s going to like this type of house because it’s, it’s missing a — , the rooms are too small or it’s got a horrible view. There’s something, there’s something wrong with it.’ My wife does pick up the furniture and the floor plan, all that stuff. If we have to move some rooms around, she gets my input, but it’s 90 percent my wife and 10 percent me.” He did the deals, and she did the houses, views, and furniture.

He was also extremely detailed as well as energized about their steep upward trajectory: “So, all I gotta do at this point is cash in on all my property and I’m at somewhere around \$13.5 [million] and I’m on track for \$15 million by, you know, within the next, you know, six months or so.” He proudly announced that pretty soon he would be earning \$2 million per year (“just sitting on my butt”); his goal was to realize a net worth of \$100 million during his working life. Like other couples, Mr. Rogers spoke more quickly, leaned forward, and was very animated as he spoke of the growth of the family’s wealth. His wife was more detached.<sup>12</sup> In sum, husbands generally expressed more economic expertise than their wives. Men also expressed confidence.

As a result, women could be off by significant amounts in their estimates, by as much as 25 percent of the total. For example, Mrs. Samuels is a deeply religious Presbyterian woman in her late sixties living in Mississippi who was widowed in her fifties when her husband died after a brief illness. She has three grown children who are involved in making charitable gifts, as she is, but her knowledge of fundamental aspects of the business are hazy. Mrs. Samuels could say with precision how much money was in each of the trusts for her three children. Crucial pieces of information, however, she could not recall. She gave a \$20 million range and was embarrassed that she could not remember it better. She stumbled in her answer:

ANNETTE: So, when the business was sold, what was it sold for?

MRS. SAMUELS: The shoe company— he . . . he had branched out into land development, and so um, so, but the company, and I hope I’m not getting my . . . just because the land was worth about as much as the company was, which really means the land was worth more. You know how that works. So, I hope I’m telling you right. Oh, I am telling you. Isn’t this awful? It was either. . . . It was either \$80 or \$60, but I’m almost positive \$80.

In the interviews with married couples, it was striking how the husbands provided vastly more precision than did their wives. Husbands and wives described the wives as lacking financial expertise. These dynamics around knowledge helped sustain men’s superior economic status within the family.

### Disengagement

Women also stressed their disengagement from economic matters. For example, Mary Saunders was in her seventies and had been widowed for two decades. At a number of points in the interview in her \$3.5 million Manhattan apartment, she proclaimed her disinterest:

I’ve close to no interest . . . in money. And my husband would say, “Well you know, we really need to talk about our finances.” I’d say, “You’re absolutely right, we do.” . . . [but] it’s just zero interest on either one of our parts. The one thing I think it was so sweet of him, I guess he knew how sick he was. I didn’t. But he went to a lawyer, and because he had actually written it down on paper to see how much money we had because he was concerned about me. . . . I came across this piece of paper. Again, just didn’t, really, pay any attention to it.

Given that her husband died when the children were quite young, it is especially noticeable that, even as a widow with two young children, she “didn’t, really, pay any attention to

12. In the terms of Randall Collins (2014), the men displayed more “emotional energy” around their wealth than did the women.

it.” Her statements in this regard were puzzling because, at other points in the interview, she revealed extremely detailed knowledge of finances. For example, she was very proud that as a young, single woman in her twenties working in graphic design, she bought a Manhattan apartment. Almost forty years later, she remembered the precise dollar amounts she had saved, that her parents gave her, and how much she sold it for later. She was also quite proud that when she met her husband and married, as she said, “I paid fully 50 percent. I was quite pleased with myself for that.” After her husband’s death, she sold the apartment they were living in, used it to complete an all-cash purchase on her current apartment, and met regularly with a financial advisor to save for college. In short, she had more expertise than she suggested, but she emphasized her complete disengagement.

The importance of gender also could be seen in couples in which women were the inheritors but managing the finances was “his thing” rather than hers. For example, Sara Cramer is a white woman in her thirties and an only child from a multigenerational dynasty family. Her family has a large number of priceless original artworks in her childhood home. The wealth inequality between her mother and father was significant: “Certainly, by the time I was in middle school probably, if not before then my mother had inherited enough money from her family that my father didn’t need to be working. . . . My father’s income was not, would not have truly . . . [been] missed.”

Nevertheless, her father, not her mother, was the “finance person.” Her mother deferred to her father; Ms. Cramer described it as a matter of interest: “[My dad] did investing, and definitely sort of was the primary sort of finance person in the family. I never got a sense that my mother was like excluded from finance or it was kept hidden from her in any capacity. It was more, I think if anything, you know, it was just, it was something that my dad was like interested in. So that was his thing.” It was only when her father developed a serious, life-threatening illness, which led to his death

when she was in high school, that her mother took over the finances. The culture of this family was that economic issues was his “interest” which sustained his higher status in the economic realm.<sup>13</sup>

This gender division of labor also surfaced between siblings. For example, when Julie Halperin’s parents both had memory problems, they had a division of labor. Her brother did the finances, and she managed the caregivers, noting that “we always operated as a team.” They worked as a team but she was not involved in the finances. This division of labor also happened with another wealthy woman, Jaime Magnone, who had a trust worth around \$45 million (as did her brother, Roy, and sister, Kimberly). When her father was dying, he put Roy “in charge,” as she related: “Roy’s the only one with an . . . MBA, and he also is on the board, he was interested, and he has the MBA, and he’s more like my dad. And so, when Dad was dying, he called one day, this might’ve been our last conversation. . . . He said, ‘I’ve put Roy in charge, if you have any problem . . . problems with the money, go to Roy.’”

At first, as she put it, her “back went up”:

When he first said, “I put Roy in charge,” I’m like, “What the hell are you talking about Roy in charge?” and then I realized . . . he was just talking about money issues, and Roy has all of the connections with people at the foundation, so it does make sense. So, what I saw as sexism, initially, and, oh, my back went up when he said that. Supposedly he admires and respects me so much, and thinks I’m brilliant, why do I need my brother in charge? And, then I realized what it probably was, was just pragmatic. Maybe . . . there’s a tinge of sexism to it, but this was Roy’s choice in life lent itself to being that person. Would my dad have done it if it was me or Kimberly who was involved in that way, in the trust company? Maybe. I didn’t perceive that growing up, that I was treated differently.

In short, the pattern of men running the finances surfaced not only in marriages but also

13. Of course, the ways in which economic issues are intermingled with other aspects of family life is a complex issue (see, among others, Krippner and Alvarez 2007; Zelizer 2005).

in sibling relationships. Women were more disengaged. In addition, family members, including parents, reaffirmed men as the appropriate choice, reinforcing the idea of women deferring to men's super expertise. Put differently, men were given more status around economic matters in families than women.

### Interweaving of Exclusion and Disengagement

Yet, in some cases, disengagement was linked to feelings of exclusion. For example, one married father living in the West Coast had inherited money from his father. However, he also worked in a family business, and he had invested in real estate for himself and his family. His wife reported that she and her husband had planned to sell a building together, but, when she wanted to take a lower offer because of her empathy for the buyers, and ultimately the offer fell through, he moved ahead and sold it without her: "We sold the house, we tried to sell the house without a realtor and we tried to do it together, and the first attempt at the sale fell through, and I felt that he blamed me for that, and then he went on to sell the house without me, and that, that was, that hurt."

She felt he was putting the money over their relationship, but she also thought he was trying to reduce their stress: "That felt like he was saying, you know, 'We are not capable of doing this without getting emotional.' And maybe there's some truth to that, but I also felt like. . . . what's more important? Our relationship or how much money we get from the sale? . . . I think he felt like it was less stressful for me and for him for us not to work on it together, and that's probably I think, you know, that was his main focus was making it less stressful."

She felt that these moments when she was "pushed out" made the power dynamics clear: it was not her money. "When I get, when I get voted out of big things like that or pushed out, I, it does often feel like, 'Okay, this is, this is not really my money.' You know? 'This is like the family money.'"

Still, in the next moment, she attributed her disengagement to her having her "head in the clouds." Her husband had special expertise ("all these laws that he knows about"), which she did not. Although they had a prenuptial

contract, he told her (and me) that he now sees their funds as joint, as she recounted in a halting, hesitant fashion:

But he, but to counter that, he's always said, "What I have is, is yours." You know? "This is what we're gonna pass down to our children, and this is what, you know, I'm working on this sort of thing right now so that, you know, we don't pay taxes on what we inherit from [her husband's parents] go to our children, so there's like generations skipping tax and all these laws that he knows that I, you know, don't, and we'll save tons of money, but I sort of have my head in the clouds about it all."

In her interview, the wife vacillated between feeling pushed out and also saying that she was not paying attention to the details. Thus she appeared to feel that she was denied key powerful roles at the same time that she was disengaged due to lack of interest as she said, "my head [was] in the clouds." Other women also integrated different rationales together in their interviews. The bottom line was the same, however. Men controlled information and power regarding money both publicly and, in many cases, privately. As a result, men and women sustained men's social status in the family as economic leaders.

### Sustaining Men's Superior Economic Positions: Marriage to Richer Women as Stigmatized

It also became clear that women's having vastly more economic resources than men was considered a serious enough problem that in some cases it prevented marriage. The impact of gender relations on intimate relationships has of course been noted in the literature. Rachel Sherman, for example, notes that when women have inherited more money than their partners, their gender relationships are, as one respondent put it, "swimming upstream." Memoirs have made a similar point. Prior work, however, underestimates the significant social stigma on union formation.

For example, Bruce Gottfried is a tall, elegantly dressed man in his sixties with silver hair who works as a financial advisor on the twentieth floor of a Boston downtown high-

rise. His net worth is currently \$12 million. He was raised in a divorced family where his (alcoholic) mother had inherited wealth and his architect father did not. His father had grown up in a small town where his own father was a prominent manufacturer who lost his money, after which the family sold their large home to move into an apartment. His father married his mother when she was his assistant out of college. His mother's family continued to be extremely wealthy, and his maternal grandparents lived on a vast estate with many employees.

Mr. Gottfried, who went to elite prep schools and to an Ivy League college, dated a woman in college in the late 1960s from a prominent, very wealthy family, the Rothschilds (a pseudonym) who appeared to have more than \$100 million.<sup>14</sup> He said that they were planning to get married: "we were the perfect couple." Her family traveled frequently to ski resorts, the Caribbean Islands, and other places; they invited him as well as the boyfriend of their other daughter and covered their expenses. But although he was from a wealthy family, he keenly felt the inequity in their wealth. Aware of his parents' situation, he explained how he felt at the time: "I'm not going to make the same mistake my father did. . . . I've seen this movie. [Laughs.] It's, it's . . . I know where it's going. I said, 'I just can't have your parents paying for me all the time and stuff like that.'" He felt that his girlfriend was very enmeshed with her own mother, and placed her family above him. He also chafed at her expectations: "She would ask me things like, 'If we get married, would you think about changing your name to Rothschild?' I go, 'Not really.' And I said, 'But I . . . You don't have change your name to Gottfried, but it— I'm not changing my name to Rothschild.'"

He admired how smart his girlfriend was, but, in the end, was very clear that he

did not want to be a guy married to a woman wealthier than myself. Two years into it, I realized I'm being kept, you know. This is what my father felt like: "Is it worth it?" So, I began refusing invitations, and refusing things, and

we ultimately broke up. . . . I saw that I did not want to be a guy who married a woman wealthier than myself. And that wasn't a sexist comment, I don't believe, or an antifeminist comment, it was a realistic comment, because I had never seen a situation where the man I— where it works. I mean, maybe Philip and [Queen] Elizabeth worked, but he walks four steps behind her, right?

He eventually married someone who had less money than he did.

Others echoed this view, noting that when men married women with more money, there were very high social costs. Men who had less money than their wives appeared to feel deeply stigmatized. One man, Larry Nimitz, for example, reported that his father's worry that he would be a "tag-along husband" led him to work round the clock to make money. Mr. Nimitz is an entrepreneur in his forties who grew up in a West Coast family. His mother is of Asian descent and his father is white; both his parents are active in finance and real estate. They were both born in the early 1950s. Strikingly, Mr. Nimitz explained that his father was quite wealthy at the time of his marriage—in current dollars, around \$14 million in assets, putting him in the top 1 percent of the country in net worth. But his mother had vastly more, more than \$200 million. His parents had a prenuptial with a "sunset clause" that expired after thirty years.

Mr. Nimitz reported that the economic disparity grated on his father. His father did not want to be "just the tag-along husband." Mr. Nimitz said that his father worked extremely hard "to catch up with my mother":

I grew up with two parents who were really dedicated to their work in a way I thought was normal, but now realize is very unusual. My father always says he hasn't missed a day of work in forty years. Two hours after I was born, I think the doctor said, "Your son is okay" and [my father] drove to the airport to be in Boston the next day. That is just how he has always been. He has always tried to catch

14. This figure is based on my estimate of the family's wealth at that time based on public information.

up with my mother, I think, financially and otherwise knowing that it is impossible, but . . . [voice trails off]. He doesn't want to be just the tag-along husband.<sup>15</sup>

His father is now worth "between \$90 and \$110 million" but, as Mr. Nimitz said with a sad smile, "it is impossible" for his father to catch up. In addition, it is not only the size of the wealth but the "billion-dollar deals" she speedily completes in a few days. Although his father is on the board of directors of major corporations, his deals have neither the size nor the speed of those of his wife. His father's preoccupation with working has important consequences in terms of his father's absence from family life. Mr. Nimitz had gone to law school and business school, and his graduation was coming up. When I asked whether his father would attend his graduation, after a short pause he replied, "I hope so."

These cases are from older couples but evidence suggests that these ideas persist with younger people. I interviewed Peyton Steadman, who at age twenty-six is blond, fashionably dressed, and quiet, living in an elegant, sunny, very large apartment on one of the most expensive streets in Boston. She works as a library assistant; her earnings of \$35,000 per year are significantly less than the money thrown off by her \$15 million trust fund (which will increase in future years). She noted that it was awkward when she had a party for people from work; her work colleagues were wide-eyed with bewilderment about how she could afford the apartment. She is currently single and hopes to marry and have a family. In a two-hour interview, which included extensive discussions of her education at an all-girls school, her career, sibling relationships, her desire for a prenuptial in the future, and other issues, she never raised any thoughts about gender inequality. Nevertheless, she is extremely direct about her experience with the gendered status hierarchy: "I just think that guys don't want the girl to have more money than them [laughs] just in essence. I don't know if it's they don't want or it just makes them feel uncomfortable, and I

think that's just the root [laughs] of it and I probably haven't figured out quite how to handle it myself, or how to bring it up or whether to bring it up or not and obviously, I don't go into details with people but definitely people are like, 'Oh, you live here. Okay.'"

With her comment that "guys don't want the girl to have more money than them," Ms. Steadman indicated that the stigma remains very much alive. In marriage, cultural scripts support husbands being higher status than wives in the economic realm. Her viewpoint suggests a strong social stigma against forming a marital relationship where a woman has significantly more wealth than the man. This stigma both reflects and sustains the idea that men should have more economic power than women within families.

When men were married to women who made vast sums of money while they did not, some gave signs of "acting out" to demonstrate their superior status. In a Californian couple, the wife, Kala, worked in banking at a very high-level position. She traveled extensively. She reported assets of "a little under ten" million dollars. In a separate interview, her husband stressed his earlier job (which lasted only a few years) where he earned more money. He also reported that he hid money from his wife: "Kala and I have a . . . shared network of somewhere between \$10 and \$12 million is my guess. Includes the house, properties, equity markers, IRA dollars, stuff like that. . . . Aside from that I have my personal portfolio, which I don't share with Kala. Kala's never asked, and I have never shared with her. . . . Kala doesn't know about it. . . . So there is another portfolio. My guess is there's several million dollars there."

Another woman, Karen Thompson, with inherited wealth of around \$40 million, had a prenuptial agreement, but then "commingled" funds with very negative consequences. She also reported that her husband physically abused her:

And my ex-husband, so I have a twenty-two-year-old daughter; we divorced when my daughter was five. She was in kindergarten.

15. For a similar finding, see Ostrander 1984.

He had beaten me and denied it, two marriage counselors told me to get out, that I was not safe. He knocked me unconscious on a dozen occasions and then not remembered it. So, I divorced him.

He was really, really, really pissed off that I divorced him, furious, and in denial that he'd ever lifted a finger against me. . . . [He] sued for child support and full custody. And he got \$70,000 a year, more than that, in child support to send [our] daughter to a public high school and, and he got several million dollars because I'd commingled some assets and in, in homes.

Although she was supposed to be protected with the prenuptial agreement, once she created a joint account with approximately \$8 million, her ex-husband was awarded \$4 million plus annual payments. Compounding the issue, one year the company in which she held 40 percent of the stock paid double dividends, which yielded \$2.2 million in income that year. Over her protests, this figure became the basis for child support.

Of course, without an interview with her ex, and possibly additional data, it is difficult to untangle this complicated tale. The key point, however, is that Ms. Thompson strongly believed that men found it “emasculating” for their wives to have more money.

In a somewhat different vein, although most families had very strong principles of an equitable division of assets among their children, in some families boys were favored over girls and girls' positions were denigrated in financial terms. For example, in the Magnone family, Ms. Magnone is a fifty-year-old woman working as a non-tenure track professor at a college in a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) field in Seattle, Washington. Her current husband lives in a different state, so she is effectively a single parent of a ten-year-old son. When she was four years old and her brother was born, her father and two other colleagues created a process to give their first-born sons income from rental properties and other passive income: “Around the time my brother was born, these three men that work together, they got together and they

structured their . . . this deal for their first-born sons, like our ‘first sons, yeah’ [said in a mock-masculine tone]. So my brother came into a source of passive income early on. And made it that he didn't have to work.” The fathers created a deliberate and explicit pattern of gender inequality favoring sons over daughters throughout their lifetimes.

Thus, in various ways, women's financial positions were denigrated relative to men's, brothers were at times financially favored over sisters, and the notion of a marriage where women had many more financial assets was deeply problematic for men.

### VARIATIONS ON A THEME

Overall, the interviews suggested family processes that supported men's superior economic status relative to women. The three women in the sample, however, were extremely knowledgeable about financial matters. Yet, even in these families were signs of men's having more explicit engagement with economic matters. One woman, Ms. Dawson, had sold a Silicon Valley company that she and her husband and another person had created and sold. Their assets were more than \$100 million after the sale, taxes, and so forth. But after the sale, Ms. Dawson went to work rejuvenating an environmental area. Her husband started another business. Ms. Dawson was knowledgeable but not particularly excited about the money. Her excitement was for her environmental efforts. In a different vein, Ms. Mahler, a woman in her nineties, had been active in her husband's real estate business, particularly after he retired. She was visibly excited about her efforts to make money. Yet, in the interview, she portrayed her husband as the economic mastermind, downplaying her efforts. Indeed, in the beginning of the interview she emphasized her late husband's vision, skill, and economic expertise. I was more than one-third of the way through the interview before it dawned on me that she had an active role in the business. She had emphasized her husband's superior economic status. Third, in a related vein, Rachel Heimowitz, a married woman in her late thirties, is the only child of a philanthropic, Philadelphia family. Her father worked hard to help

her understand key aspects of financial planning:

We talk about it a lot. We talk about the plan. He's great at, right, leaving me the spreadsheet of his insurance policies and who to contact and what are the, the list of the places that my mother and I could get cash if need be during the probate. And let's see, what else? You know, the codicil to the will. He's been great in the last ten to fifteen years in communicating with me about what I should know. I actually went to him at one point and said, "I'd like to sit down with you and ask you a bunch of questions." He said, "Make an appointment and bring your notebook." So, we did that a few times. I was able to ask questions about even like what would you want your funeral to be, who are all the people in your life and their phone numbers so I know how to call them, and your advisory team and all that.

Yet he never revealed the amount of their net worth to her or her mother. When asked the approximate size, she did not know, even though it was crucial information: "Ironically, my father has trained me in unbelievable ways my entire life, he never shares what the amount is. I know from the value of the two homes he owns and what he helped invest in mine and properties he's bought for other family members and friends that, you know, it's got to be upwards of ten million. . . . But he'll never tell me the number."

Nor does her mother know: "So, honestly, my mother doesn't know either."

When asked to estimate her father's net worth, she laughingly replied, "between five and a hundred." Ms. Heimowitz felt that her father "didn't want to undermine my drive" and she felt confident that she could support herself. She also added that in terms of her father's withholding this information from his wife and his daughter, "you could say it's control. There's clearly that going on." Thus, although she was interested in delving into the details, she was excluded. Although more knowledgeable than other women in the study, in these families the men still had more public

engagement or expertise in economic issues than the women did.

### **DISCUSSION: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PROCESSES SUSTAINING ECONOMIC STATUS**

Studies of status have helped us understand key mechanisms sustaining and challenging the maintenance of status (Accominotti, Lynn, and Sauder 2022; Destin et al. 2022, this issue; Ridgeway and Markus 2022, this issue). Cultural factors are also critical to the maintenance of status hierarchies (Lamont 1992; Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014). Too often, scholars focus on status as a social location rather than as a process bolstered by social and cultural factors, including widely shared cultural schemas. Yet evidence is ample of the power of culture in shaping men's and women's unequal participation in economic institutions (Correll et al. 2017). Research is also extensive on ways in which gender becomes the "master frame" in shaping family members' interpretations of gender and work (for an overview, see Ridgeway 2009, 2019).

Social scientists often do not focus enough on how men and women make claims for economic expertise within the family, or, more generally, how families' members interact around economic matters, preferring to emphasize the affective dimension as well as women's leadership in nurturance and household management. As a result, the social processes undergirding husbands' and wives' economic status in the family have received less attention. In this article, drawing on qualitative interviews with unusually wealthy families, I have sought to demonstrate that, somewhat surprisingly, highly educated women quickly proclaim their lack of knowledge on economic matters relative to men, although in some cases closer questions reveal that they in fact have considerable information. Women assert their disengagement with financial matters. On the basis of their lack of knowledge and engagement, women work to downgrade their role as economic actors, deferring to their more expert husbands. Men and women report strong social barriers against the formation of marriages where women would have more economic

power than their husbands. Taken together, the gendered cultural schemes deeply inflect the class dynamics in households of the upper class and help forge and sustain status inequalities (Scott 2020).<sup>16</sup>

The study points to the considerable interactional work needed to sustain inequality with some people making claims of expertise and others deferring to, or, at the least, not challenging these claims. These wives, by affirming their lack of interest, lack of knowledge, and lack of skill in household wealth management, also affirm their husbands' expert status as knowledgeable, expert, and high-status economic actors. Here, the findings are consistent with other work on "fragile masculinity" (Connell 1991; DiMuccio and Knowles 2020) as well as research on gender differences in confidence and overconfidence (for a review, see Kay and Shipman 2014).

Within the confines of this design, it is difficult to untangle the relationship between status hierarchies within the family and displays of power, compensatory actions, and other forms of division of labor in the home. Although beyond the scope of this article, signs were evident of women exerting much more clarity, expertise, and control over childrearing, food choices, and other household matters, even when their husbands were aggravated by their choices. Despite some hints of compensatory behavior, with men "acting out" when women had more wealth than they did, future work is needed to unpack the impact of these dynamics on family life.

Of course, social deference by women toward wealthy men happens in other spheres outside the family as well. For example, Ashley Mears (2020) vividly describes the deference by many different parties, including beautiful young women, for "whales" who consume in a conspicuous fashion in expensive night clubs. Brooke Harrington (2016) delineates the elaborate help brokers give to wealthy families in the management of wealth, securing tax advantages, and protection of assets. These brokers also can help with a wide range of personal ser-

vices as well, all of which are aimed at sustaining the high status of the wealthy and smoothing their pathways. If anything, these studies suggest even more elaborate rituals of deference to wealthy men's status outside the family than inside it.

How does this influence inequality? Despite formal legal equality explicitly laid out in a number of settings, women appear hesitant to engage, and, especially if the marriage ends, may be vulnerable to significant economic losses given their lack of expertise. Relative to the men in the family, they depend more on the expertise of others. In addition, other research suggests that women give more to philanthropy than men do (Mesch et al. 2015). If women had more status in economic arenas, it might lead families to give away more assets rather than continue to build them, thereby tamping down the growth in wealth inequality. As they proceed, men and women also model these behaviors for other family members, including their children, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of gendered norms for behavior.

In the end, status inequalities within families are perpetuated by moments, hours, and years of social interaction. Nor is this a one-person process because upholding status inequality is linked to the actions of both men and women. For example, as we have seen, men actively avoid partnering with women who will exert more financial power than they, and women, even young women, actively defer to these norms because both women and men are aware of the negative reactions if they enter into socially stigmatized marriages. Also, once partnerships are established, the excitement, pleasure, and energy men show is striking relative to women's. These gendered patterns can be disrupted, particularly in the case of illness or incapacitation, but often it is husbands, uncles, and brothers who manage wealth and wives, nieces, and sisters who defer. Hence men's and women's status positions in families are not fixed but relational; both men and women are participating in creating and sustaining these gendered patterns. In intimate

16. It is difficult to assess the degree to which these status hierarchies would be upheld in families lower down the class hierarchy where resources are tighter, and women might claim more power. But, again, other studies show men continuing to dominate financial matters.

relationship within the family, inequality in status between men and women both reflects and promotes gender inequality in the broader culture.

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