

Questions for Cross-Class Couples

Being in a cross-class couple provides opportunities as well as challenges. Since many of us grow up in a class-segregated way, we have much to learn about the experience of someone from a different class. Since class is composed of resources and culture, differences can occur on a variety of levels. If there are current or future differences in access to money, this can add to the complexity of class relations.

Unlike other types of difference (race, age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, etc) class is often unacknowledged by society. We often don't have language to describe our class realities. Breaking the taboo of talking about issues of class and money can be hard, but our experience has shown us that it is also very rewarding. We hope that the following gleaned from our experience facilitating cross class dialogues and cross class couples groups will be useful to you as you find ways to bridge the class divide in your intimate relationship. As you are working on figuring out all that makes up your relationship also consider other factors that might be at play: personality, place in your birth order, gender, age, race, ethnicity, and on.

The following are some questions and suggestions that may be useful to ask yourself and each other as you journey down the cross-class road of intimacy.

Overview

What class backgrounds do you each come from? What are the factors that go into your sense of class? Who did you learn to look up to? Who did you learn to look down on?

Culture

How does your class background impact:

- your sense of time
- of privacy, space/openness
- how you express and deal with anger and conflict
- your sense of what is appropriate in terms of what are good manners
- ways to behave in public
- appropriate language
- grammar, conversation, speech, tone, and volume of voice
- how close you stand to others
- how you joke, how you play
- how you show respect
- your sense of aesthetics
- your sense of ethics

Values

- Do you have differences around whether you should be trying to get ahead in life or creating stronger community with family and friends?
- Do you feel driven by a mission or are more drawn by loyalty to your clan. or kin?

Communication

- Do you feel that there is a right way to communicate that comes from the way you were raised? If your partner communicates differently are you open or judgmental?
- Do you have scheduled times where you talk intentionally about class and money issues?
- When there is a problem, what are the underlying feelings and needs beneath? Can you name them to each other? Can you communicate your understanding of the other's feelings and needs without mixing it up with your judgments?
- Can you offer and receive support willingly and joyfully?
- What are the other class voices in your head (your wealthy brother or your sister on welfare)? What are they saying? How do you feel in reaction to what those voices say?

Families and children

- Do have class-related feelings when visiting one another's family's of origin? Do feelings of shame, guilt, or embarrassment rise up in relation to judgments of people and their circumstances?
- Do you share those with each other?
- Do you make an effort to get to know one another's extended family members?
- How do extended family feel around you and you around them? What are the touchy points if there are any?
- Does your family have judgments about your partner's class and your choosing a partner of a different class?
- Do you feel that you have "betrayed" your family by choosing your cross-class partner?
- In what ways, if any, does class impact how you relate to your partner's children if they have them from a previous partnership?
- What do you enjoy about being with your partner's family?

Life choices and work

- How does class impact each of your work choices? What does that mean in your relationship?
- How do you feel about your partner's work choices? How is that related to your class background?
- How has your class background encouraged or discouraged each of you to achieve your dreams?
- How do you balance commitment to career, family and contribution to social change? How do you see your partner's choices? How much do you try to balance these needs as individuals and as a couple?
- How do you deal with differences between you of how you pursue those dreams?

Decision-Making

- Who makes what decisions based on what? How comfortable are you with those patterns?

Finances

- Do you keep track of your income and expenditures, your assets and debts? Do you each have the information you need to evaluate your choices as a couple?
- To what degree are your resources merged or separate? What has informed those choices?
- If there are differences in assets or income, how does that affect each of you?
- Does one person have to ask for money when they need it? What does that feel like to the both of you?
- How can the person with less money be part of decision-making about and understanding of the family finances?
- How can the person with more money be aware that they may be holding onto decision-making without realizing it?
- How can the person from a less economically privileged background take more responsibility for relationship finances?
- How do your current choices around income and expenses reflect those your long term visions as a couple?
- Might you consider budgets that play with “Mine,” “Yours,” and “Ours?”
- Would it be useful to have an agreement about finances, property, etc. before moving in together?
- How can you make sure that each person has some spending autonomy?
- Do you have long-term visions for lifestyle, children, their education, your retirement, and passing money on?

Support/ Community

- How can you come together with other couples in similar situations? .
- Do each of you have opportunities meet with others in your specific situation?
- What can you say with people who are similar to you class-wise that you have a harder time saying to your partner?

Appreciating one another

- Have you found out about each other’s childhoods and ask what strengths and limitations each of you gained from your class backgrounds
- What do you value most about each other? How do you show it?
- What does the other person bring to the relationship that you don’t?
- How do you benefit from your partner’s class background in terms of their strengths?
- What are you learning from each other?