# Fifth Paper: Habitus and Social Class

In this paper, you will be looking for social class markers in two places, one frequented by working-class people and one by upper-middle-class people.

You should visit stores, which are open to the public, which would welcome your purchasing power no matter what your cultural tastes (as opposed to more closed spaces: a country club, a wedding, or a private home). During your trip, you should be thinking about Lamont's question about what constitutes the main symbolic boundaries of the upper-middle-class (the dominant class): money, morals, or manners (culture)?

### How to Collect Your Data In this assignment, you need to visit two different sites: one that is frequented by people from an upper-middle-class background (or higher) and one that is frequented by people of working-class background (or lower). Because people of different social classes tend to segregate themselves geographically, you may want to pick areas that you know upper-middle-class and working-class people live, like Haddonfield, Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia, or Camden and Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. I particularly want to make sure that you are aiming high and low enough so that there is a significant enough contrast in your sites. You will wish to compare sites that are similar types, such as a grocery store with a grocery store or an auto dealership with an auto dealership. Once you pick out two stores, you should look at the [census information](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml) for the area around those stores to check that you are aiming high and low enough (look at median earnings and family poverty rate).

On your visit, you will want to note:

* the general atmosphere of the place
* the kinds of items for sale
* the layout and organization of the place
* the prices of the items for sale
* the other people in the store—both customers and sales personnel—including their demeanor, clothing and hair style, content of conversation, gestures, styles of movement
* any norms of behavior that you notice
* your own comfort level

You will want to note patterns and similarities, as well as differences, within each establishment. It is important that you take notes about these sites **immediately** after your visit, so that you can draw on the particular details to persuasively support your argument.

### How to Organize Your Paper

#### *Argument* In your introduction, you want to make an argument about whether class boundaries are being drawn symbolically in these establishments, and if so, how they are being demonstrated.

#### *Description of the Two Sites* First, you want to briefly describe the two sites you visited.

#### *Accounting for Your Own Habitus* Then, you need to describe your own class background, using the class terms from Gilbert and Kahl's diagram. Because this is based on your class background and habitus, I want you to use your childhood's social class as your guide here. Father's occupation is generally a better indication of social class background than mother's occupation, but you may have had different caregivers than a father and mother—grandparents, an aunt, a single mother, two parents of the same gender, a stepfather and mother.

* How did you determine your class background? Prove your case that your social class background is what you say it is.
* How did your class background affect your own feeling of comfort or discomfort in these two sites?
* What does your feeling of comfort or discomfort tell you about the symbolic boundaries being drawn?

#### *Analysis of the Two Sites* First, re-state your argument using different words (you can now be more specific, since we now know the two sites). Then, referring to your descriptions above, now tell us what those details signify, drawing on the terms and concepts discussed in Michele Lamont's Money, Morals, and Manners and in Jennifer Steinhauer's New York Times article.

#### The major questions to consider are:

#### Are social class boundaries palpable or visible in these stores?

#### If so, on what basis are they being made?

#### *Conclusion* Here, you should restate your argument, using different words, about the maintenance of symbolic boundaries through a commercial establishment.

### How I Will Evaluate Your Paper For this paper, you need to demonstate to me that you understand the concepts of ****social class****, ****habitus****, ****cultural capital****, and ****symbolic boundaries**** discussed by Michele Lamont and in class discussions/lectures. I strongly recommend that you review the theoretical sections of Money, Morals, and Manners (pp. 1-14, 174-192).

Any paper that does not have correct APA citation in the text and bibliography will be marked down.

Your grade is dependent on:

* your understanding of the concepts of social class, cultural capital, symbolic boundaries, and habitus;
* a close observation and attention to detail: describing and citing the two sites;
* the depth of your analysis: your ability to link this detail to the concepts above; and
* the quality of your sentences and the organization of your paper.

A draft of the paper is due on **Friday, May 3rd** (1%). The paper is due **Monday, May 6th** (10%). Come prepared to discuss your analysis in class.