

## The Questions

### Life History

1. Have you ever lived for at least a year in an American neighborhood in which the majority of your fifty nearest neighbors probably did not have college degrees?
2. Did you grow up in a family in which the chief breadwinner was *not* in a managerial job or a high-prestige profession (defined as attorney, physician, dentist, architect, engineer, scientist, or college professor)?
3. Have you ever lived for at least a year in an American community under 50,000 population that is not part of a metropolitan area and is not where you went to college?
4. Have you ever lived for at least a year in the United States at a family income that was close to or below the poverty line? You may answer "yes" if your family income then was below \$30,000 in 2010 dollars. Graduate school doesn't count. Living unemployed with your family after college doesn't count.  
Take your best guess. For estimating your family's past income, you should multiply what you or your parents used to make by the inflator appropriate to that time. For example, if your dad made \$7,000 a year when you were growing up in 1970, you should multiply that by 5.61. He made about \$39,270 in 2010 dollars. You may estimate the inflator for any particular year from these: 1940, 15.66; 1950, 9.12; 1960, 7.41; 1970, 5.61; 1980, 2.64; 1990, 1.67; 2000, 1.26.
5. Have you ever walked on a factory floor?
6. Have you ever held a job that caused something to hurt at the end of the day?

### People Who Have Been Part of Your Life

7. Have you ever had a close friend who was an evangelical Christian?

8. Do you now have a close friend with whom you have strong and wide-ranging political disagreements?
9. Have you ever had a close friend who could seldom get better than Cs in high school even if he or she tried hard?
10. During the last month, have you voluntarily hung out with people who were smoking cigarettes?
11. What military ranks do these five insignia represent?



#### Sports, Pastimes, and Consumer Preferences

12. Choose one. Who is Jimmie Johnson? Or: Have you ever purchased Avon products?
13. Have you or your spouse ever bought a pickup truck?
14. During the last year, have you ever purchased domestic mass-market beer to stock your own fridge?
15. During the last five years, have you or your spouse gone fishing?
16. How many times in the last year have you eaten at one of the following restaurant chains? Applebee's, Waffle House, Denny's, IHOP, Chili's, Outback Steakhouse, Ruby Tuesday, T.G.I. Friday's, Ponderosa Steakhouse

#### Some American Institutions

17. In secondary school, did you letter in anything?
18. Have you ever attended a meeting of a Kiwanis Club or Rotary Club, or a meeting at a union local?
19. Have you ever participated in a parade not involving global warming, a war protest, or gay rights?
20. Since leaving school, have you ever worn a uniform?
21. Have you ever ridden on a long-distance bus (e.g., Greyhound, Trailways) or hitchhiked for a trip of fifty miles or more?



## Media and Popular Culture

22. Which of the following movies have you seen (at a theater or on a DVD)? *Iron Man 2*, *Inception*, *Despicable Me*, *Tron Legacy*, *True Grit*, *Clash of the Titans*, *Grown Ups*, *Little Fockers*, *The King's Speech*, *Shutter Island*
23. During the 2009–10 television season, how many of the following series did you watch regularly? *American Idol*, *Undercover Boss*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Lost*, *House*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Two and a Half Men*, *The Office*, *Survivor*
24. Have you ever watched an *Oprah*, *Dr. Phil*, or *Judge Judy* show all the way through?
25. What does the word *Branson* mean to you?

## Scoring Your Access to the Rest of America

1. *Have you ever lived for at least a year in an American neighborhood in which the majority of your fifty nearest neighbors did not have college degrees?* Seven points maximum. Score 4 points if you answered “yes” plus a bonus point for every five years you have lived in such a place up to fifteen years.

In the 2000 census, 92 percent of Americans lived in zip codes in which the majority of adults ages 25 and older did not have college degrees. Seventy-seven percent lived in zip codes where fewer than a third of those adults had degrees. You should make your judgment with regard to your neighborhood, not your zip code. Zero points if you are thinking of a gentrifying neighborhood in which you were one of the gentrifiers.

2. *Did you grow up in a family in which the chief breadwinner was not in a managerial job or a high-prestige profession (defined as attorney, physician, dentist, architect, engineer, scientist, or college professor)?* Seven points maximum. Score 4 points if you answered “yes” and 3 bonus points if the chief breadwinner for most or all of your childhood was in what you consider to be a blue-collar job.

The percentages of households in which the chief breadwinner

was not in a managerial job or a high-prestige profession ranged from 85 percent in 1960 to 75 percent in 2010.<sup>3</sup>

3. *Have you ever lived for at least a year in an American community under 50,000 population that is not part of a metropolitan area and is not where you went to college?* Seven points maximum. Score 5 points if you answered "yes," 6 points if the place was under 25,000, and 7 points if you lived in a town of fewer than 10,000 people or in a rural area.

The percentage of Americans fitting the description in the question was 58 percent in the 1960 census and 48 percent in the 2000 census. You may find it surprising, as I did, that 21 percent of Americans still lived in rural areas as of the 2000 census and another 10 percent lived in towns of fewer than 10,000 people—in total, almost a third of the population. That figure is not completely cleansed of bedroom communities, but it's close.

4. *Have you ever lived for at least a year in the United States at a family income that was close to or below the poverty line? You may answer "yes" if your family income then was below \$30,000 in 2010 dollars. Graduate school doesn't count. Living unemployed with your family after college doesn't count.* Seven points maximum. Score 5 points if you answered "yes" and two bonus points if you experienced poverty both as a child and as an adult.

A majority of Americans in their forties have been below the poverty line for a year at least once since their teens—56 percent for the 1979 cohort of the NLSY.<sup>4</sup>

5. *Have you ever walked on a factory floor?* Six points maximum. Score 2 points for "yes," 4 points if you have ever had a job that entailed routine visits to factory floors, and 6 points if you have worked on a factory floor.

I was prompted to use this question because of a personal experience. In the mid-1980s, my sponsor for a speech at a local college in Wichita was the owner of a factory that made cardboard boxes, and my host took me to see it. It was fascinating—the ingenious machines, the noise, the speed, the organization. Then it struck me that every product I used was made in such a place—in the aggregate, thousands of them, constituting the



world that made my life possible—and until then I had never seen even a glimpse of it except as a small child on a single visit to Maytag Company's assembly line. My visit to the box factory was a quarter of a century ago, and I haven't been on another factory floor since.

6. *Have you ever held a job that caused something to hurt at the end of the day?* Six points maximum. Score 3 points if you answered "yes," add 2 bonus points if the job lasted longer than a summer, and a bonus point if you're talking about a job that made you ache all over.

The question applies to any part of the body that hurts because of physical labor using the large muscles. Headaches don't count, and neither does carpal tunnel syndrome. Sore feet from having to stand up for long periods of time does count.

If you answered "no" to this one, your bubble is thick indeed. John Kenneth Galbraith, who grew up on a farm, once said that after you've worked on a farm, nothing else you ever do is work. One might also say that if you've never had a job where something hurts at the end of the day, you don't know what work is. You certainly don't know what work is like for the large proportion of the American population who do hold jobs that cause something to hurt at the end of the day.

7. *Have you ever had a close friend who was an evangelical Christian?* Four points maximum. Score 2 points if you answered "yes," and 4 points if you are an evangelical Christian yourself.

The distinguishing characteristics of evangelical Christians are belief in the historical accuracy of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, including especially the divinity and resurrection of Christ, and belief in the necessity of personal conversion—being "born again"—as a condition for salvation. In the Pew Forum's survey of the U.S. religious landscape in 2004, with a sample of more than 35,000, 26.3 percent of the respondents said they were affiliated with evangelical Protestant churches, the single largest category. Catholics came in second at 23.9 percent, mainline Protestant churches third at 18.1 percent, and "unaffiliated" fourth at 16.1 percent.<sup>5</sup>

8. *Do you now have a close friend with whom you have strong and wide-ranging political disagreements?* Four points maximum. Score 2 points if you have one such close friend, 4 points if you have more than one, but *not* if they are disagreements within the same side of the political spectrum (no points if you are a liberal who has an ultraliberal friend or a conservative with an ultraconservative friend).

The reason for this question is obvious from the discussion of red and blue SuperZips in chapter 3. See Bill Bishop's *The Big Sort* for a comprehensive analysis of this issue.<sup>6</sup>

9. *Have you ever had a close friend who could seldom get better than C in high school even if he or she tried hard?* Score 4 points for "yes."

I use this question as a way of getting at the question I would like to ask, "Have you ever had a close friend who would have scored below the national average on an IQ test?" I can't ask that question, because readers who grew up in an upper-middle-class neighborhood or went to school with the children of the upper-middle class have no way of knowing what *average* means. The empirical case for that statement is given in detail elsewhere, but it may be summarized quickly.<sup>7</sup> The typical mean IQ for students in schools that the children of the upper-middle class attend is around 115, compared to the national mean of 100. In such a school, almost all of the below-average students, the ones you thought of as the school's dummies, actually were above the national average. Even if the students were arranged in a normal distribution around a mean of 115, only 11 percent of the students could be expected to have IQs under 100.<sup>8</sup> But they probably weren't normally distributed, especially at a private school that uses a floor of academic ability in its admission decisions. So if you went to upper-middle-class schools and think you had a good friend who was below the national IQ mean, and are right, it had to have been one of the students who was at the absolute bottom of academic ability.

If you answered "yes" to this question as stated, you need to ask yourself if you fudged about the definition of "close friend." We hate to think we're such snobs that we have consorted only



with people as smart as we are, and the temptation is strong to define as a "close friend" a classmate in K-12 who didn't seem very smart but with whom we exchanged friendly greetings in the lunchroom.

*During the last month have you voluntarily hung out with people who were smoking cigarettes?* Score 3 points for "yes."

In the Centers for Disease Control's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System for 2009, 35 percent of the respondents said that they smoked some days or every day.<sup>9</sup> Rates of smoking have a strong socioeconomic gradient, but the wording of the question is designed to get at something else. Open smoking in the world of the new upper class has become so rare that it is nearly invisible. Cigars and pipes appear occasionally, but it is possible to go for weeks in the new-upper-class milieu without smelling a whiff of cigarette smoke anywhere except on a public street. Elsewhere in America, there are still lots of homes, bars, and work sites where smoking goes on openly, and nonsmokers in those settings accept it as a fact of life. The question asks to what extent you have any voluntary participation in that part of America.

*What military ranks are denoted by these five insignia?* From left to right, the five stand for colonel (or navy captain), major general (or navy rear admiral, upper half), corporal, master sergeant, and captain (or navy lieutenant). Five points maximum. Score 1 point if you got at least one correct, 3 points if you identified all of them, and 5 points if you ever served in the armed forces.

In 2007, 1.4 million Americans were on active duty in the armed forces, another 1.3 million were in the reserve, and 805,000 civilians worked directly for the Department of Defense. People who live in counties where a large military base is located account for another 8.4 million.<sup>10</sup> In the 2000 census, 26.4 million Americans were veterans of the armed forces. In mainstream America, just about every neighborhood is peppered with numerous veterans, and the local chapter of the VFW or American Legion is still a significant civic force in much of America.

*Option 1: Who is Jimmie Johnson?* Three points maximum. Score 3 points if you identified Jimmie Johnson as the NASCAR driver.

Score 1 point (consolation prize) if you identified him as the former coach of the Dallas Cowboys (the coach spells it *Jimmy*, not *Jimmie*).

For tens of millions of Americans, Jimmie Johnson is the most important figure in sports. He was the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series champion for five consecutive years from 2006 to 2010, a feat as unlikely as pulling off the Grand Slam in golf or tennis. NASCAR itself rivals the NFL, NBA, and Major League Baseball by several measures of attendance, economic clout, and size of fan base.

*Option 2: Have you ever purchased Avon products?* Score 3 points for "yes."

Avon is one of the largest companies selling cosmetics and perfume door-to-door, with sales of \$9.9 billion in 2007.

13. *Have you or your spouse ever bought a pickup truck?* Score 2 points for "yes."

In 2010, Americans bought about 1.6 million new pickup trucks.<sup>11</sup> Occasionally members of the new upper class buy one for fun or because they need one at their summer place in Montana. But it remains true that people who have a need for the things that a pickup truck can do are usually engaged in activities that people in the new upper class often don't do at all, or things that the new upper class hires other people to do for them.

14. *During the last year, have you ever purchased domestic mass-market beer to stock your own fridge?* Score 2 points for "yes."

The leading qualifying beers are Budweiser, Coors, Miller, or Busch, light or regular. The disdain of the new upper class for domestic mass-market beer is nearly as intense as its disdain for people who smoke cigarettes.

15. *During the last five years, have you or your spouse gone fishing?* Two points maximum. Score 1 point for "yes" and 2 points if you or your spouse go fishing more than once a year.

Fishing is a regular pastime for about 40 million Americans and at the center of the annual vacation for millions more who don't fish regularly.<sup>12</sup> It is so popular that it supports not just one but two professional bass-fishing tournament circuits, the Bass-



master Tournament Trail and the Walmart FLW Tour, plus several regional tours. Top prize for the Bassmaster Classic is \$500,000. Win the Forrest Wood Cup, and you get \$1 million. Both major tours are nationally televised.

15. *How many times in the last year have you eaten at one of the following restaurant chains? Applebee's, Waffle House, Denny's, IHOP, Chili's, Outback Steakhouse, Ruby Tuesday, T.G.I. Friday's, Ponderosa Steakhouse.* Four points maximum. Score a point for each time you ate at one of them up to 4.

However much they disapprove of fast food in theory and restrict their visits, almost all members of the new upper class at least know what the inside of a McDonald's looks like. But how about the chains of sit-down restaurants that form such an integral part of life in most of America? The nine I listed are the ones with the most outlets in the United States.<sup>13</sup> I could not get statistics on meals served by them, but given that these nine chains had revenues of more than \$12 billion in 2009 (probably much more), and all of that comes from dinner checks that ran around \$5 to \$25 per person, the aggregate number of meals served by just the top nine chains has to be in the high hundreds of millions, at least.<sup>14</sup> Why a list of nine chains instead of the more natural top ten? Because one of the top ten is Chipotle Mexican Grill, which is to the casual-dining genre of restaurants as Whole Foods is to grocery stores.

16. *In secondary school, did you letter in anything?* Two points maximum. Score 2 points if you got any high school varsity letter *except* for the debating team or chess club. Score 2 points if you were a cheerleader or in the marching band.

The stereotype of the overeducated elitest snob as a teenager is someone who either went to a private school where team sports were not a big deal or went to a public school where he held himself aloof from the team sports and collateral activities that are such an important part of the culture of public high schools. Does the stereotype fit you?

17. *Have you ever attended a meeting of a Kiwanis Club or Rotary Club, or a meeting at a union local?* Score 2 points for "yes."

Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs have for several decades been a primary networking organization for local businessmen. They are more influential in small cities than in large ones, but their reach extends everywhere. They are a significant source of secular social capital as well, playing an active role in a variety of civic activities. Unions usually do not play a large role in generating social capital for the community at large, but they are often centrally important to the work life of members of the union.

19. *Have you ever participated in a parade not involving global warming, a war protest, or gay rights?* Score 2 points for "yes."

Celebratory parades, as opposed to parades on behalf of causes, occur everywhere in America, from small towns to ethnic neighborhoods in the largest cities, but not so often in the enclaves of the new upper class. This question asks if you have ever been part of one. Helping to decorate a float counts even if you didn't get to ride on it.

20. *Since leaving school, have you ever worn a uniform?* Three points maximum. Score 1 for "yes," a bonus point if you did so as part of your job, and a third point if it was while you served in the armed forces.

A uniform can consist of as little as a shirt with your employer's logo that you are required to wear on the job. It gives you a chance to score a point or two if you are a member of a social club that occasionally has rituals involving uniforms, if you are a Civil War reenactor, or if you participate in an adult athletic league. Wearing a uniform in a dramatic production or on Halloween does not count.

21. *Have you ever ridden on a long-distance bus (e.g., Greyhound, Trailways) or hitchhiked for a trip of fifty miles or more?* Two points maximum. Score 1 point for having used each form of transportation.

About 25 million people rode on a Greyhound Bus in 2008 alone. There are no statistics on hitchhiking.

22. *Which of the following movies have you seen (at a theater or on a DVD)?* Iron Man 2, Inception, Despicable Me, Tron Legacy, True



*Grit, Clash of the Titans, Grown Ups, Little Fockers, The King's Speech, Shutter Island.* Four points maximum. Score a point for each movie seen up to 4.

These represent the ten top-grossing films of 2010 that were not principally directed at children or teens.<sup>15</sup>

23. *During the 2009–10 television season, how many of the following series did you watch regularly? American Idol, Undercover Boss, The Big Bang Theory, Grey's Anatomy, Lost, House, Desperate Housewives, Two and a Half Men, The Office, Survivor.* Four points maximum. Score a point for each series up to 4.

These were the ten television series (omitting a sports series, *NBC Sunday Night Football*) with the highest Nielsen ratings for the 2009–10 television season. Number 1, *American Idol*, had a rating of 9.1 and an audience share of 24 percent. Number 10, *Survivor* (the “Heroes and Villains” sequence), had a rating of 4.5 and an audience share of 13 percent.<sup>16</sup>

24. *Have you ever watched an Oprah, Dr. Phil, or Judge Judy show all the way through?* Four points maximum. Score 1 point for each of the three for which you have watched an entire episode and a bonus point if you watch any of them regularly.

The *Oprah Winfrey Show* is, of course, the highest-rated talk show in American history, in its twenty-fifth and last year as I write. *Dr. Phil* is in its ninth year, and is rated second only to *Oprah*. *Judge Judy* is now in its fifteenth year and is said to be watched by about 10 million people on a typical day. References to them have become a common part of the popular culture.

25. *What does the word Branson mean to you?* Four points maximum. Score 2 points if you knew that Branson is a big entertainment center in the Midwest, and 4 points if you've gone to Branson yourself. No points for thinking of Richard Branson.

Branson, Missouri, is one of the leading tourist destinations in America. With a permanent population of only 6,050 in the 2000 census, it has more than fifty different theaters offering daily live performances, almost all of them devoted to country music and its derivatives. In 2009, during the worst year of the recession, it still attracted more than 7 million visitors.<sup>17</sup>