

Topic 3: Social Class and Cultural Identity

What is Social Class?

Social Class refers to the hierarchical divisions of a capitalist society, in which wealth, income and occupation form the defining characteristics of each group. The classic formulation of social class in Britain is to see Britain as being divided into three classes: working, middle and upper class. Social Class, is however, open to change, and most agree that the last two decades have seen the emergence of an underclass, with little prospect of full time employment. These four terms are in common usage and we have to start somewhere, so here are some starting definitions which you should aim to move beyond! *Look at the OHT and add in the key features!*

By the 1980s **occupational skill** determined the class someone was in, not just whether someone was in manual or non-manual employment. According to this new scale, the higher up the class scale you go, the more formal education or training an individual needs to get into that profession. The terms middle and upper class still make some kind of sense with this scale, but the boundaries are now more blurred! This is the era of the **new working classes**, the **new middle classes** and the underclass.

New occupational scale – first used 2001		Upper/ Middle/	Working/ Under
1	Higher managerial and professional occupations, e.g. company director, doctor, teacher		
2	Lower managerial and professional occupations, e.g. nurse, police officer, soldier		
3	Intermediate occupations, e.g. secretary, driving instructor, computer operator		
4	Small employers and own account workers e.g. publican, farmer, taxi driver		
5	Lower supervisory, craft and related occupations e.g. plumber, train driver, butcher		
6	Semi-routine occupations, e.g. shop assistant, hairdresser, bus driver		
7	Routine occupations e.g. waiter, cleaner, building labourer		
8	Long term unemployed/ never employed		

Objective and Subjective definitions of class

Some sociologists argue that class is objective, in which case an individual is working class if they do manual work, irrespective of what class they feel they are in, and in this sense, there are fairly clear class boundaries in modern Britain. Other sociologists argue that the subjective side of class is more important, arguing that a class only exists if people recognise that they are the same and share interests and goals in common, in which case class is a state of (collective) mind.

For the most part, there is some level of agreement around the fact that people in the same class, by virtue of doing similar jobs, share similar amounts of wealth and income, and similar levels of educational achievement; What is more contentious is the idea that people in the same class share similar lifestyles, values and identity.

The Traditional Working Class in Modern Britain

The two processes that lead to the emergence of the traditional working class were industrialisation and urbanisation, which resulted in masses of individuals living in cities and doing manual work. Traditional working class jobs included heavy labouring and factory based work. In 19xx x% of the population were engaged in manual labour. Xxxxxx points out that as industrialisation advanced into the 20th century, those engaged in traditional manual work, especially in industries such as mining and factory work, had a very strong sense of their economic and social position and a very strong sense of class identity. The features of the traditional working class include:

- Traditional industries such as manufacturing and mining are often dangerous and involve hundreds of manual workers working collectively in a confined area, which created the conditions for solidarity (a sense of working together towards a shared goal)
- **Share culture and lifestyle...** One of the most influential ways of looking at working class culture was outlined by Lockwood in 1966. He used the term '**Proletarian Traditionalist**' to describe the traditional working class culture. He argued that this culture was
 - **Collective rather than individualistic** Pursuit of common goals through trades unions was seen as more important than the pursuit of individual career goals
 - **Immediate Gratification**
 - Often lived in close-knit communities in extended kinship networks. Mutual support, welfare was often provided by relatives and even friends of the family and neighbours
 - Much time spent in working men's clubs with and a feeling of fraternity and comradeship. little social or geographical mobility so a sense of collectively was reinforced by strong social networks emphasised mutual aid in every day life and the importance of joining in as an obligation.
- **Shared Identity** In traditional working class jobs, the majority of manual workers who actually 'did the real manual work' were controlled, or managed by a much smaller number of supervisors, who did not 'get their hands dirty', spent most of their time in offices, not on the factory floor, and were visually distinct, wearing suits rather than work clothes, and yet were paid more. The primary aim of the supervisors was to manage the workers on behalf of the Bourgeoisie; all of this created the conditions for an 'us and them mentality'. Workers tended to be organised into Trades Unions which represented workers' interests, which were seen as being threatened by management.
- Part of this shared identity was **Political alignment** - Many workers saw the Labour party as representing their interests. At general elections until the 1970s, the labour party could rely on the support of 80% the traditional working classes. Trade Union support also reinforced the relationship between the traditional working classes and Labour.

The New Working Class

Even as long ago in 1966, Lockwood recognised that the Traditional Proletarian did not make up the whole of the working class. Harlambos recognises three important trends that have led to changes in the working class:

1. Britain has gone through a process of **deindustrialisation**, which has affected industries such as mining, shipbuilding and steel and coal especially. As a result, Manual workers decline as a proportion of the working population. In 1911 80% of workers in Britain were manual workers, but by 1991 this had fallen to 33% and today manual workers make up less than 25% of the workforce.
2. Since the 1950s there has been a massive expansion of the welfare state, which has led to an increase in the numbers of public sector workers such as teachers, nurses and civil servants and clerical workers. There has been a corresponding process of **Embourgeoisement**: Where increasing numbers of the working classes enter the middle stratum and the middle classes come to increasingly dominate the stratification system. HOURGLASS
3. The traditional working classes have become **increasingly divided** because...
 - Some working class careers have prospered more than others. Some sectors have become increasingly skilled, and higher paid, while others have become less skilled
 - There is an increasing division between the working classes who have regular, well paid employment and those with less secure employment. The former benefited from the right to buy their council houses in the mid 1980s and now have more in common with the middle classes, whereas the latter have gone on to become the new underclass.
 - There has been a significant increase in recent years of self-employed people, many of whom work in manual labour, but are their own bosses.

The decline in traditional working class identity

Ken Roberts argues that as a result of changes in the class structure, class consciousness, and hence working class identity has declined. He argues that as a result, the working class is now more disorganised and more disempowered. He argues that there are four main indicators of the decline in traditional working class consciousness:

1. Trades Union membership has declined
2. The Labour party is no longer the party of the working class
3. Close Knit working class communities that used to be the basis of class solidarity are being broken up by factors such as the decline of heavy industry and urban redevelopment and geographical mobility
4. Working class leisure is also much less organised today. The old men's clubs have disappeared and replaced by television and commercial leisure.

The Middle Classes

We discovered above that 'middle class jobs' have expanded rapidly in the United Kingdom over the last few decades, and there is no sign that this trend is set to stop. The term middle class remember, is a broad term to describe non-manual work. According to Stephen Moore, the following are the key features of the middle class in Britain (p45)

Key features of the middle classes

Family	Value home-ownership and are more likely to have mortgages than other classes. Generally live in the suburbs and are more likely to commute
Education	Generally encourage children to do well in education. Very keen on private education, although their children do well in the state sector too. 80% of university students are from middle class backgrounds.
Values	Meritocracy.... Deferred gratification.....
Cultural pursuits and leisure activities	Are there any leisure activities that are distinctly middle class?

Extension work: Pierre Bordieu on middle class culture

Bordieu argues that there is such a thing as a distinct 'middle class' culture. Look up 'Bordieu' 'cultural capital' and 'the Habitus' in your text books at home and/ or Haralambos edition 6 or 7 and take brief notes on these concepts.

Savage: Four distinct types of Middle Class groups

Savage argues that it is too simplistic to conceive of the middle class in the United Kingdom as having a shared culture. This is mainly because there are such huge numbers of people within the middle classes and such a wide variety of jobs within the middle class. These four classes are based around the first four categories in the New Occupational Scale.

Middle class category	Features
Higher managerial and Professionals	Such as doctors and lawyers. Savage claims that these share an intellectual identity based on a long and successful education. They value cultural assets or cultural capital such as knowledge, qualifications, achievement and they often see themselves as serving a higher purpose, namely the social good.
Lower Managerial	Generally less qualified than professionals and are more likely to have worked their way up through the ranks of a company. Savage argues that this group generally defines its status in terms of its standard of living and leisure pursuits. Managerial identity is less secure today because of globalisation, recession, and takeovers
Self employed owners of small businesses	Roberts (2001) argues that these have traditionally been very individualistic. Against the welfare state, they have a great faith in self discipline and work rather than luck.
White collar or clerical workers	Despite having low pay in line with many traditional manual jobs, their conditions of work are superior to manual workers. However because of new technologies there has been a deskilling of this group of workers although they rarely see themselves as working class do not mix with manual workers and spend their money in different ways.

Researching changes in class identity...

Look at the items below, which are both examples of research evidence. Answer the following questions:

- How reliable are these sources of information as indicators of shared class identity?
- What other sources of information could you use to verify the strength of working class identity in the past.
- How would you go about ascertaining the strength of working class identity today?

Class Dealignment

Item A

Social class and voting behavior

	1964	2001
	% Non Manual workers	% Non Manual workers
Conservative	62	34
Labour	22	38
Other	16	28

(Source: Haralambos 08)

Item B

In 1997 Tony Blair managed to win a greatly increased share of the middle class vote, including a plurality over the Conservatives among lower middle class (C2) voters and home owners, while holding on to Labour's working class vote.

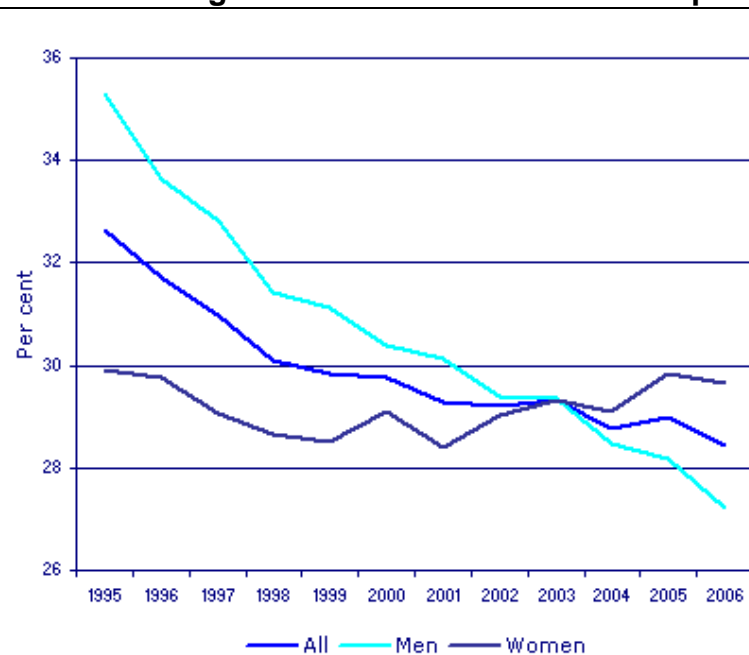
Based on polling data in the 2005 General Election, however, Labour's support is eroding at both ends. Labour's share of the unskilled working class vote has declined sharply. According to ICM, Labour was supported by 58% of these voters in 1997, and just 45% in 2005.

However, Labour has retained support among owner-occupiers with a mortgage - who perhaps are. They still have a 39% to 30% lead compared to the Conservatives (in 1992, the Conservatives led in this group by 48% to 30%).

Source:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/vote_2005/issues/4520847.stm#MIDDLE%20CLASS

Item B: Changes in Trades Union Membership



In the quarter ending December 2006, the rate of union membership among all workers was 25.8 per cent, a decrease from 26.2 per cent in autumn 2005.

In 2006, union membership in Britain, estimated from the Labour Force Survey, was approximately 7 million. Trade union membership has declined over the last two decades. In 1979 13.3 million people were members of trade unions and the proportion of employees who were union members stood at 55%.

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=4>

<http://www.bized.co.uk/compfact/tuc/tuc15.htm>

Extension work: Find out more about Trades Unions by visiting the web site of the Trades Union Congress: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/>

The Underclass (research area 1)

The main features of the Underclass

Charles Murray (1989) first coined the term 'The Underclass' when studying the United States. He then had a look at Britain and warned, in the late 1980s, that we were set for a massive expansion in the underclass within twenty years. Using Stephen Moore find three features of the Underclass and note them down here.

Twenty years on... have Charles Murray's predictions come true?

Read the article online entitled 'meet the neets' and answer the two questions below:

1. What does NEET stand for?
2. What are some of the key features of being a 'NEET'?
3. What does this suggest about Murray's prediction of the problem of the underclass getting worse?

Shared identity amongst the underclass...

Add in supporting evidence for there being a shared identity amongst the underclass...

The Traditional 'Upper' Classes (research area 2)

The 'upper class' normally conjures up images of 'toffs and royals' living an exclusive lifestyle. This is one way of looking at the 'upper classes'

Upper class culture

Family life	Made up of a small number of extended families who are often connected by marriage. They tend to share a common background in terms of an elite education at public schools
Education	Public schools such as Eton, Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge moulds the outlooks of the children of the elite so that they realise their shared class interests. They socialise these pupils into a shared culture as outlined below...
Values	Support for conservatives, nationalism and tradition, as well as a hostility towards socialist ideals.
Cultural pursuits and Leisure pursuits	Usually high culture, including debutants balls, hunting, shooting, and sports such as polo, and rowing. Also ballet, opera

Supporting evidence for the upper class having a shared and closed culture

The old boy network and the old school tie/ Elite self recruitment

Look up the above concepts in Haralambos and Stephen Moore for AS, and explain what the above are here. Also find supporting or contradictory evidence for their existence...

Further sources of information about the 'Upper Classes'

Use this space to add in any further details or interesting sources of information about the 'upper classes'

The Transnational Capitalist Class (research area 3)

What is the Transnational Capitalist Class?

Look up the concept of the 'Transnational capitalist class' in Haralambos and Stephen Moore for A2, and the Internet and add in details here....

Supporting evidence of the wealth, power and shared interests of the TCC

The difference between the wealth and power of the TCC and the rest of us is staggeringly huge! Using the Internet, try to find at least three pieces of evidence that demonstrate the gap between 'them' and 'us'

The post-modern view on class and class identity

The Post Modern view is that class no longer really matters in modern Britain. Post modernists argue that since leisure is more important than work to most people, leisure is a more important source of identity than work, and people no longer identify themselves according to their class background,. They further argue that ethnicity, gender and sexuality are far more important as sources of identity than class background. Finally, post modernists argue that since the occupational structure of the United Kingdom has become more complex, so boundaries between classes have largely disappeared post-modernists argue that there is no clear relationship between class and leisure pursuits.

Evaluating the post-modernist view on class: does class still matter ?

Work through the articles below and decide whether you think class matters as a source of shared identity in Modern Britain.

Click on this link: <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=293&issue=113> and read the article by Martin Smith entitled 'The shape of the working class'. Note down as many reasons as you can below why he argues that the working class is still a distinct class with a distinct identity, despite the changes outlined on page 4 of this handout.

Arguments for there being a distinct working class.... (Find three, you could find more!)

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ICM Poll about class 2007

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/oct/20/britishidentity.socialexclusion>

Ten years of Labour rule have failed to create a classless society, according to a Guardian/ICM poll published today. It shows that Britain remains a nation dominated by class division, with a huge majority certain that their social standing determines the way they are judged.

Of those questioned, 89% said they think people are still judged by their class - with almost half saying that it still counts for "a lot". Only 8% think that class does not matter at all in shaping the way people are seen.

The poorest people in society are most aware of its impact, with 55% of them saying class, not ability, greatly affects the way they are seen. Of people born to working class parents, 77% say they are working class too. Only one fifth say they have become middle class.

The poll paints a picture of a nation divided by social attitudes and life-chances, with 47% of those living in south-east England considering themselves middle class, against 39% in the north and 35% in Wales and the west. Northern England remains a working-class heartland, with 57% of people describing themselves as part of it.

But many class attitudes have survived economic change. That suggests people are still judged by where they come from rather than how much they earn.

ICM Research interviewed a random sample of 1,011 on October 17-18. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules

What does the above article suggest about class in Modern Britain?

The survey of social attitudes towards class, 2006

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/6295743.stm>

According to a survey of social attitudes, 57% of adults in the UK claim to be working class. But what is that in today's society?

There was once a time when class was clearly defined, but in recent years politicians have been banging on that the UK is now classless and a meritocracy. So what is working class nowadays?

Even under the New Occupational Scale only 31% of people are actually employed in what are categorised as traditional "blue collar" occupations, according to the survey. The number who considers themselves working class far outstrips this. Some argue that this is because the boundaries between working class and middle classes are blurring....

- Wendy Bottero argues that this is because people define class by many things, like status and social origins, not just jobs and education. "There are so many definitions of what working class is," she says, "which is why it's so difficult to pin down a definitive meaning. Socially and morally it is a heavily-laden term."
- Research has also shown that people often identify themselves with a label that is not perceived as pretentious - they don't want to be seen as a snob, she adds. This goes some way to explaining the survey's findings. So they may regard themselves as middle class, but project themselves to researchers as working class!

On the other hand, philosopher Dr Julian Baggini argues that The 57% are not kidding themselves – they are working class because.....

"Culturally this country still is predominantly working class," he says. "Superficially it seems we are middle class because we have more of the trappings of middle class life, but the majority of people are just working class with more money, not middle class."

Attitudes, likes and dislikes remain the same, he says. Television is a good example, as most successful prime time shows - like X Factor - are basically talent shows. It goes back to the working class tradition of working men's clubs. They were based around entertainment and music."

What does this article suggest about class identity in the United Kingdom? (Find three things)

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The last word... back to Marx's View on Class

Marxist sociologists argue that the distinctions that most of us worry about: whether we are middle or working class for example; the time we spend criticising the underclass; and the irrational deference we confer on royalty are all distractions away from the most persistent and important class divide of all: The division between the real ruling class and the rest of us!

Karl Marx's Conception of Class

Karl Marx (1818-1882) argued that the industrial revolution led to the emergence of two new classes: The Ruling Class, or the **Bourgeoisie**, who were the wealthy owners of the new industries and the impoverished working class, or **Proletariat** who had to earn their money by working long hours in these factories. The essential difference between these two classes is that the basis of Bourgeois wealth and power derives from their ownership of industry, while the proletariat are propertyless and the only source of income available to them is their labour, which they need to sell to the Bourgeoisie in order to survive. The Proletariat have to work for living, hence why they are called the working class, while the Bourgeoisie merely live off the labour of the proletariat. Karl Marx argued that these two classes existed in conflict and shared common interests. It was in the interests of the Ruling Class to exploit the working class in order to increase profits, while it was in the interests of the working class to come together and overthrow their exploiters through violent revolution.

While Marx recognised that there was a middle class, he argued that this would eventually be subsumed into the proletariat, and he thus thought this class to be of little significance.

Summary of Marx's conception of class

<i>image</i>	Bourgeoisie	
	Proletariat	

Marx argued that the class someone is in is based on their relationship to the social structure, or more specifically, it is based on their relationship to the means of production, and has nothing to do with the class that they feel they are part of. Karl Marx believed that anyone forced to work for a living was 'working class' and anyone had enough wealth to invest and live without working was Bourgeois. Thus for Marx, even if Alan Sugar and Richard Branson come from working class backgrounds and even if they think of themselves as 'working men' they are not working class, similarly, if you are engaged in unskilled manual work, but you don't feel working class, then you are wrong!

Marx, Class and Class Consciousness

Marx was aware that most of the proletariat didn't realise their shared interests, but he argued that because of the antagonistic, exploitative relationship that existed between them and the Bourgeoisie, they would eventually come to realise their shared interest in overthrowing this exploiter class. The whole point of Marxism was to encourage the proletariat to realise their shared interests and to get them to take power from the Bourgeoisie.

Assess the view that class background is no longer an important source of identity in modern Britain

Well here we are. You have now been well and truly **introduced** to the concept of class and class identity in Sociology. The above is the essay question you are likely to get in the exam. The easy way in is to go back through the handout and note down evidence for and against the view that class identity is still an important source of **shared identity**

	Against the view that class is a source of shared identity	For the view that class is a source of shared identity
Marx vs Post-Modernism		
Working class		
Middle class		
Underclass		
Upper class		
Transnational Capitalist Class		
Conclusion		