



Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study

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ABSTRACT

This article reports a secondary analysis of the fieldnotes collected by Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt as part of their studies of affluent workers in Luton in the early 1960s. I argue that the ideal type distinction between power, prestige and pecuniary images of society, elaborated by Lockwood, fails to recognize that money, power and status were often fused in the statements and attitudes of the workers they interviewed. I show that most respondents had a keen sense that dominant social classes existed. I go on to argue that the hesitations evident in the fieldnotes when respondents were asked about class were not due to defensiveness so much as fundamental differences in the way that the researchers and the workers thought about class. The central claim that respondents sought to elaborate was their ordinariness and individuality; findings which, when compared with recent research, suggest considerable continuities in popular identities.

KEY WORDS

affluent workers / class identities / individualism / ordinariness

There have been three distinct phases in the study of working-class identities in Britain since the emergence of sociology as an academic discipline after the Second World War. From the 1950s the study of class consciousness was central to research on stratification, community and family (Bott, 1956; Dennis et al., 1956; Frankenberg, 1966; Glass, 1954; Goldthorpe et al., 1968a, 1968b, 1969; Lockwood, 1957, 1966; Mann, 1973). This first generation died out in the early 1970s: its epitaph is Martin Bulmer's (1975) collection, *Working-class Images of Society*. This volume brought together papers from leading sociologists, many of which pointed to problems and limitations

in the sociological analysis of the topic. From the mid 1970s to the early 1990s, the study of working-class identities became almost entirely dormant. Researchers interested in stratification concentrated on structural aspects of inequality (notably, Goldthorpe, 1970). Research on identities, increasingly influenced by the 'cultural turn', became sceptical of the latent reductionism entailed in relating identities to class position. Only Gordon Marshall (Marshall, 1983; Marshall et al., 1988) sustained this tradition during this period, especially in his influential co-authored book, *Social Class in Modern Britain* (1988). However, from the early 1990s, a striking revival of interest in understanding the salience and nature of working-class identities in Britain has become evident, from two different areas. Feminist writers within education and psychology as well as sociology, have explored the stigmatized identities of working-class women (Lawler, 2000; Reay, 1998; Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine et al., 2001). A second group, more closely associated with class analysis, have assessed contemporary class identities as a means of examining debates about the end of class (see Bradley, 1999; Charlesworth, 2000; Devine, 1992, 2003; Devine et al., 2004; Evans, 1992; Savage et al., 2001).

Even among this latter group, there has been little engagement with older debates about class-consciousness (the main exceptions are Devine, 1992; Devine et al., 2004; Marshall et al., 1988). Recent inquiries are not framed by the analysis of the relationship between work, industrial relations and community relations, which were the focus of the earlier generation. Instead, interests in schooling, parenting, leisure and consumption predominate. Recent theoretical inspiration is derived from contemporary theorists such as Butler, Foucault and (especially) Bourdieu, rather than Weber and Marx.

Given this lack of engagement, this article will return to the fieldnotes of probably the most important study from the 'heroic' generation: John Goldthorpe et al.'s series of Affluent Worker studies. My first aim is to use this as a key case study to explore why the first generation research lost momentum in the 1970s. Here I will show that the interest in deductive models of 'class imagery', inspired by arguments such as those of Bott (1956), proved to be a theoretical dead end. My argument here largely reiterates the conclusions drawn by researchers of the time, who emphasized the fragmented and contradictory nature of class identities, and then, understandably, largely abandoned interest in them. My second aim, however, is to show that if we re-read the fieldnotes today in a different spirit, organized around contemporary interests in class identity, we can detect certain patterns in the way respondents talked about class which were not evident to the researchers of the time.

The first section introduces the Affluent Worker Study, and explains how its arguments need to be read within the context of the emergence of academic sociology during this period. I also report on the methods I used in my re-study. The second part questions the value of the analytical, deductive models, used by the research team. Rather than being able to distinguish between 'power', 'money' and 'status' models of society, I will show how these elements were inextricably linked in the minds of the respondents. The third section of the

article argues that we can interpret these elements as values embodying a kind of 'ordinary individualism' premised on an overarching distinction between the 'social' and 'natural'.

The Affluent Worker Study and British Sociology

There is virtual unanimity among commentators that the Affluent Worker Study (Goldthorpe et al., 1968a, 1968b, 1969) is 'probably the most widely discussed text in modern British sociology' (see Marshall, 1990: 112; and more generally Clark et al., 1990; Devine, 1992; Platt, 1984). Originating as an inquiry into the argument made by Abrams and Rose (1960) that the electoral weakness of the Labour Party was due to the growing embourgeoisement of sections of the working class, its findings became orthodoxy not only among sociologists, but also in neighbouring academic disciplines and among political commentators and critics. Its central claim, that growing affluence does not entail the end of class, or of class politics, but that class remains central even in a prosperous, consumerist society, has defined British debates about stratification ever since.

Perhaps the single most important influence of the Affluent Worker Study was its repositioning of class as a structural, rather than a cultural, concept. When the study was conceived in the early 1960s, the research team rejected the market research basis of Abrams' arguments, which deduced embourgeoisement simply from the fact that manual workers reported middle-class identities in response to tick-box questionnaires (Goldthorpe and Lockwood, 1963). Rather, they sought to understand the meaning of workers' class identity in a more holistic way, placing them within their wider conceptions of the social structure.¹ Accordingly, their 229 male respondents, drawn from three workplaces in Luton, taken as exemplars for affluent manual workers, were interviewed twice – once at their workplace, and once at home – when their wives were also present. These interviews were comprehensive in scope, and the questions on class identity, asked towards the end of the home interview, were remarkably full. Unlike the rest of the questionnaire, questions were only weakly structured. Starting from an initial prompt: 'People often talk about there being different classes – what do you think?' the interviewers asked about 'the main lines of class division; the composition of classes; the determinants of the class position of individuals and groups; subjective class identification; the extent and channels of social mobility; the causes of the phenomenon of class in general; and the nature of ongoing or probable changes in the class structure' (Goldthorpe et al., 1969: 200–1). The research team was insistent that they should 'seek to establish the respondents own views', and that the order of questions could be varied, 'following the natural flow of discussion, and interviewers were instructed to try so far as possible to formulate their questions *in ways consistent with what they had already learned about the respondents' ideas and conceptions*' (Goldthorpe et al., 1969: 200, italics in original). Where

husbands and wives disagreed about their views, they were recorded separately. The subsequent discussion often led to several pages of written notes, with verbatim exchanges of up to 2000 words, amounting to around a quarter of a million words in total. These notes constitute probably the most comprehensive and detailed qualitative study of class identities ever undertaken in Britain.

As a means of elaborating their thinking, one of the team's members, David Lockwood, developed an influential account of class identity in his article 'Sources of Variation in Working-Class Images of Society' (Lockwood, 1966). This article was written at an early stage in the analysis of the interviews, when the researchers were struck by the extent to which interviewees talked about money when they were asked about class.² Building on Elizabeth Bott's (1956) claim that 'when an individual talks about class he [sic] is trying to say something, in symbolic form, about his experiences of power and prestige in his actual membership groups and social relationships both past and present'. Lockwood (1966) argued that there were three possible working-class images of society, each with a particular social location. Workers with a power model saw society divided between two classes (a 'them' and an 'us'), and lived in occupational communities with solidaristic work environments, such as mining. Workers with a prestige model divided society into three distinct groups according to their place in a status hierarchy, and tended to work in small enterprises (such as farms) and areas of mixed housing where employers might influence them into accepting deference. Crucially, Lockwood argued that there was a third group of workers with a 'pecuniary model', who divided society into a graduated hierarchy with no marked breaks. These were likely to be the kind of affluent workers in new residential communities who they were researching in Luton.

When one reads the finished study now, it is interesting that so little is made of this part of the research (see further Bechhofer, 2004). Only eight pages report their findings, and little attempt is made to convey the flavour of their respondents' testimony through quotation: only three short extracts are reported (although further discussions are reported in Goldthorpe, 1970 and Platt, 1971). In part, this reflected the authors' concern to code this qualitative material consistently. Only those responses which generated a high degree of inter-coder consistency were reported (see Bechhofer, 2004; Goldthorpe et al., 1969: Appendix C). This normally meant ignoring the more qualitative features of the interview and concentrating on those aspects of the respondent's testimony which could be quantified – for instance the number of classes which respondents identified. In the process, a huge amount of evocative material was left 'on the cutting-room floor'. Having gathered rich qualitative material, the researchers then explicitly stripped out such materials in favour of more formal analytical strategies when they came to write up their findings.

The appeal of this strategy needs to be understood in terms of the authors' advocacy of a deductive approach to sociology. They were scrupulous in noting that when talking about class there was 'a considerable amount of diversity ... respondents were sometimes rather vague and confused in their formulations'

(Goldthorpe et al., 1969: 147). Rather than inductively seeking to make sense of this complexity, they treated Lockwood's three working-class images of society as ideal types, and considered how far the interview material could be read to indicate the predominance of any one of them. This led them to their famous argument that 'there was within our sample of affluent workers a marked propensity to regard social class as primarily a matter of *money*' (Goldthorpe et al., 1969: 147). Neither 'power' nor 'prestige' models were significant, and Lockwood's expectation that affluent workers had a pecuniary model of society was therefore endorsed.

This argument played a major role in the future thinking of these authors, especially of Goldthorpe's. Cultures of status and power, the kind of 'symbolic capital' that Bourdieu elaborated in the French context and which has proved influential in more recent British studies, were largely discounted as not being important in the minds of affluent workers. Class mattered less as a cultural concept and more in terms of the structure of opportunities it allowed, with workers adopting a largely instrumental approach to their situation. This is the main message of the three volume study: 'increases in earnings, improvements in working conditions, more enlightened and liberal employment policies do not in themselves alter the class situation of the industrial worker ... He [sic] remains a man who gains his livelihood through placing his labour at the disposal of an employer in return for wages' (Goldthorpe et al., 1969: 157).³ We can see, emerging out of this study, the genesis of the 'class structural' approach to class which later dominated in British debates and which Rosemary Crompton (1998) defines as the 'employment aggregate' approach to class analysis.

These conclusions were contested. In an important paper, Jennifer Platt (1971) showed that some parts of the interview, where respondents were asked to rank occupations, did not demonstrate the predominance of money models, but indicated an awareness of status. Several of the contributors to Bulmer (1975) took issue with Lockwood's neat typology of working-class images of society. Cousins and Brown (1975) noted in their study of Tyneside shipbuilding workers that money was seen as correlate, rather than determinant of class. Nonetheless, because no alternative framework for analysing class identities was developed, researchers subsequently shifted their interests to more structural concerns. This makes it an intriguing project, to return to the original Affluent Worker data, to consider if we can now re-interpret the class identities of the respondents in more cogent terms.

I have examined the data on class identity in the 227 questionnaires, now held as part of the Qualidata Archive at the University of Essex.⁴ So far as I am aware this is the first attempt to re-analyse this data. I conducted some counts of easily quantifiable issues, namely the number of classes reported, the order in which they were reported, and the class that respondents themselves reported. More significantly, I recorded full quotations that bore on issues of money, power and status, and under themes raised in recent research: ordinariness, hesitancy and individuality. In what follows I seek to make sense of the

respondents' accounts of class using direct quotation and reporting general patterns emerging out of the interviews.

Money and Class

There is no doubting the overwhelming frequency of references to money in responses to these questions about class.

People with money can do what they like – money talks. Many people have got money – not through honest work either. (39)

Main difference is money: if you've got money, live in a nice house, in a nice area, and a car and all the rest of it. (75)

Money is nearly 90 percent of everything. (3)

In a few cases, one can see how this reference to money is indeed part of the pecuniary model of society delineated by Lockwood. A Cypriot immigrant talked of thousands of classes, each with their own income so that 'each man is in a different class' (No. 45). Most others, however, saw money as part of a fundamental class divide. Goldthorpe et al. (1969: 149) noted that most of those who have a money model of society also think there is an upper class, an 'elite strata whose economic superiority was such as to give them a qualitatively different position'. However, analytically, their separation of money from power meant that they did not systematically explore their intersection. Most respondents used money as a means of talking about distinctively powerful classes. Consider interview 47: he reported disapprovingly the existence of a 'toffee nosed' upper class, and also a middle class of 'people who can afford a house in the £3000 to £6000 bracket – they have a little bit more money than the ordinary working man – people like departmental managers and things like that'. He then characterized the working class as 'a bloke who earns anything from £8–10'. While seeing class in terms of money, these monetary divisions are seen as part of a clear class divide. Later in his discussion, No. 47 develops his account, noting that he sees himself as working class because 'its his type of job – just an ordinary job on the shop floor' (i.e., there is a group of 'us'), and that the rich are rich because 'I think it was handed down really – handed down from father to son – rich families marry each other like – in horse racing jockeys and training families marry each other'. Because Goldthorpe et al. (1969) see money models of society as analytically different from power models, they do not register the consistency of this account. Differences between classes are fundamentally financial ones, but the causes of these are related to the exercise of power, marriage and inheritance:

[M]oney is the only difference between them [classes]. If you're working class it is because you have only a certain amount of money. Those who have more must be in a different class. You can't keep up ... Take Oxford and Cambridge, it takes money to get in there. You can only get this if your parents can let you go. [The rich

class are] society and Mayfair Johnnies, people who've inherited money. Take my old gov'nor, he paid the headmaster of the school to coach him and pushed him into Christ's Hospital. Only money done that. It goes right through like that ... its not ability, that's how it works. (190)

[The upper class is] rich tycoons. I suppose that's how we base our classes, on wealth and if we put a good accent on our speech ... from the top they give a lead of corruption ... I suppose they want to hang on for grim death to what they have inherited ... We are crying out for new towns and the upper should be forced to give up some of their grouse shoots and parks for them. (137)

We can see how talking about money is in part a way of talking about power, and in particular about the prominence of the upper class. It is striking that although Runciman (1966) emphasized the restricted reference groups of the working-class in this period, this sample is almost unanimous in identifying a rich, upper-class elite as central to their understanding of class. Only 5 percent of respondents did not refer to an upper class of some description, and there was far more certainty about its existence than there was about that of the working or middle classes, the existence of which significant minorities denied. Indeed, 55 percent talked about the 'upper class' before mentioning any other class. This upper class was seen predominantly as an aristocratic, landed, class (as 81 put it 'lords, ladies, the gentry, sirs ... Generals and all that crowd'). Sometimes, celebrities were also placed in this upper class.

Royal family is in it. Armstrong-Jones. Got no time for them myself. Too much pomp and circumstance [Wife – oh, I like it]. Yes, you like it, but I don't. There was a while ago that Macmillan went away for a holiday and when he came back there was no one to meet him at Gatwick – so he got back in the plane till somebody came. (31)

... film stars and them, TV personalities, millionaires, industrialists. (33)

Talking about the upper class in this way is a means of differentiating a small elite from the 'average' person. Thus, for respondent number 178, the very rich were people with 'big combines. Macmillan and the property men like Chow. People that manipulate the financial state of the country', and the working class by contrast 'get a wage every week'. The upper class is public, visible, whereas most people are relatively private; it is a class which does not have to work, whereas most people do; it is a class where money is abundant, whereas most people have to watch carefully; it is a class whose position is based on inheritance, whereas most people have to 'make their own way'. This very strong and clear identification of an upper class which combines having lots of money, with high status, public visibility, power and social connections qualifies Goldthorpe et al.'s (1969: 146) claim that 'few saw society as being divided into two confronting classes on the basis of the possession or non-possession of power and authority'. Although most respondents did not differentiate middle from working class, or white collar from blue collar, on the basis of workplace relationships, their views could be seen as eminently compatible

with one rendering of a Marxist differentiation between a small bourgeois class and a large working class, if the former is taken to include landowners. This sense was sometimes linked to clear statements about the inequity of these arrangements:

... some people thieve it; some of those rich people, why are they rich? Because they hold thousands of acres of land that don't belong to them, thieved years ago and handed down. The duke of Bedfordshire, what right does he have to half of Bedfordshire? Hundreds of years ago they fought – let's have a fight here ... if people couldn't pay taxes, that land was taken from the people, that how these big estates come about. (34)

Class and Individuality

I have argued that Goldthorpe et al.'s reliance on an analytical distinction between money, power and status prevented them from recognizing the close links between these in the minds of the respondents. It is clear from the fieldnotes that questions on class identity often provoked puzzlement and confusion. Admittedly, with only a very few exceptions, respondents had heard of the concept of class, and nearly all could articulate some kind of view about it. However, respondents stumbled over the questions. This issue has been noted in recent research, especially that influenced by Bourdieuvian currents, where it has been noted as evidence for the 'dis-identification' with class. It is possible to detect possible defensiveness in some of the fieldnotes. When respondent number 110 was asked if there were different classes, he replied:

I don't know. I shouldn't think so. People are all the same. I've never run up against it. I don't approve of it, anyway. I don't think it makes for a very happy community if there are class distinctions. But there are no classes – at least I've never seen them.

Why do you think that?

Well I don't. I mean I've never thought about it at all, it'd just be hearsay, anything I said, what do you mean ... I can't help you, I'm sorry, I just don't know.

The interviewer noted on the questionnaire that 'unfortunately, although the interview had gone well, he closed up when class was mentioned, and I couldn't induce him to say very much. He got nervous and I had to abandon it'. However, in general there was little defensiveness that respondents were not respectable and middle class. After all, 78 percent of those prepared to report a class identity called themselves either working or lower class. Rather, there was a sense that they were not answering in the 'right way' for the academic sociologist, giving rise to unease on their part that they were falling short. Thus, the interviewer for respondent 57 noted that he was,

... very intelligent and lively ... Seemed to sense what kinds of information particular questions were seeking. The direct questions he answered quickly and would look up as if to say 'what's next?' – this contributed a lot to getting as far as the pol-

itics section in about 1½ hours. However on class he got out of his depth, thought too hard ... As the section wore on, his answers got slower and more uncertain. I think he was rejecting a lot that came into his head as not sufficiently well thought out. Towards the end he was openly exasperated, but in a good humoured way, and just said he couldn't find anything else to say.

This sense that No. 57 did not think he was answering in the 'right way' seems to be related to the fact that most respondents did not see their view of class as arising out of their own experiences of work and community, in the kind of way that Bott and Lockwood imagined. Indeed one interviewer reported his or her impressions about the salience of class identity following an interview with No. 85 which in his or her view produced 'precious little'.

I'm beginning to wonder whether this class reference group theory isn't suffering from 'a fallacy of misplaced concreteness'. Most people will construct their picture of the classes, but what they 'spontaneously recognize' hasn't much to do with reference groups – at least that has been a general impression. When they're even slightly mobile or embittered hard-core working class it appears clearly; otherwise the picture is vague and not very personally felt.

This frustration was because the interviewers were interested in thinking about class in different ways to their respondents. This was especially true with respect to probing about which occupations fitted into particular social classes. This concern with identifying class boundaries was a staple feature of sociological debates about class, but it does not seem to strike many chords among the respondents thought about class. No. 80 was asked:

What sorts of people do you think are in the upper class?

I suppose directors – people who've had a good education, and get a good job which they know nothing about ...

Lower class?

Well, we'll say a manager – well union officials, they've got a good job [I think a somewhat surprised look must have crossed my face at this point].⁵

When pressed about the main factor which determined someone's class position, the respondent was puzzled and finally replied:

It's the way he acts socially – not so much the money – you can find a rich man ... [he stopped abruptly, apparently fatigued by his Herculean efforts].

We see here how the respondents' difficulty in deciding which occupations fit into certain classes finally causes the interviewer to be (privately) sarcastic, as if everyone should be a lay sociologist and be able to put occupations into classes in the approved sociological manner.⁶ In general, however, it is clear that most respondents do not see class as really being about clusters of occupational groups in this way. Class performs other features in their thinking. It defines ideas of individuality and authenticity.

Very few working-class identifiers indicated any kind of shame about their class identity. Nearly always it seemed to be a means of claiming that they were an ordinary, 'run of the mill', kind of individual, without any special advantages in life. In this respect they were the inverse of the public 'elite' class that so many of them had identified. Thus, the working class were defined as 'ordinary people like myself – around these estates' (32), 'ordinary factory blokes, factory workers, the council house sort of tenant' (173), or the 'ordinary factory workers' (133).

Ordinariness is a means of refusing both a stigmatized, pathologized identity (as with No. 137 who noted that 'we are ordinary: we think we are ordinary. We are. We are not the lowest') at the same time that it refuses a privileged position:

... the likes of myself and friends I've got and the majority of people on this estate. People who've had to work for a living all their lives and never had it handed to them like a silver platter. (31)

These kinds of statements do not link the working class to particular kinds of employment relations or places of residence. Rather, the working class comprises normal, authentic people. By differentiating it from a public, upper-class elite, respondents could see themselves as ordinary people, largely devoid of social distinction. Goldthorpe et al. were correct in pointing to the general lack of obvious status awareness among the Luton workers. On the whole, respondents made little of distinctions between white collar and manual worker, or between skilled and unskilled workers. Rather few looked down on any group beneath them. There was little sense of differentiation between middle and working class, and indeed some respondents were happy to identify themselves as both working class and middle class. Claims to either working- or middle-class position allowed respondents to identify themselves as 'normal individuals'. For No. 22, the middle class was equivalent to the 'average worker',

... he's just the one that goes to work, enjoys himself. When he works he works, enjoys himself after. He can save a little bit when all the bills are paid.

Even among those respondents who identified a distinction between the middle and the working class, what still mattered was their concern to be 'ordinary individuals', people able to live their own lives without any given privilege but making the choice to live life their own way.

... it all depends on the individual, whether they make a go of it – some do, some don't. (1)

... we prefer to be individuals ... we don't like the middle class who jump up – and we can't mix with the upper class and there's a certain amount of people like us. (44)

What I think is different is to what some people think ... it's up to them – I've got my own thoughts and I just don't class them as me and the same. I'm just happy go lucky. I speak to anyone – I'm not stuck up at all, it's just everyday life. (48)

Taking them as individuals there is not much difference between any human beings ... [*Why are there different classes*] – you’ve got me on this one. There shouldn’t be, we are all human beings. We are supposed to be the same, but are we? Personally I think I’m as good as the man with thousands in his pocket [but], it’s only nature, isn’t it. (49)

I don’t think about class really, there’s no one above me, when I go anywhere I am as good as they are ... everyone’s the same in my book. (77)

This is not a sociological approach to class, concerned to differentiate people into groups according to occupational criteria. Rather, we can see these views as articulating a strong naturalistic and individualistic ethic (on which see Strathern, 1990). Ultimately, people are individuals, and leaving aside the special case of the upper class, everyone is in the same boat. ‘Natural’ divisions of sex and ethnicity are seen as primordial, bestowing modes of deportment that are given and unchangeable by society. This is a basic, elemental individualism, with little conception of the individual as a social product, but rather an insistent declaration on the individual as ‘natural’ sovereign of their own lives. Within this conception, the class structure exists in a shadowy way, not as a social system differentiating occupational groups, but as the stage on which the individual necessarily acts. As Goldthorpe et al. (1969: 154) themselves noted, the class structure ‘was represented as a basic *datum* of social existence ... which individuals had in the main to accept and adapt to’. Respondents often thought it important to have classes so that individual’s ‘natural’ desire to get ahead can be led to appropriate rewards.

You’ve got to have somebody who is that little bit better – if everyone is on the same basis, how can I put it ... say you’ve got a man with £1000 and a man with £5 ... you’ve got to have something to go for, to have a figurehead to get up with, if we were on the same level there would be no reasons for trying to get on. (52)

We can see here how the idea of the upper class is important for confirming this sense of ordinariness. It serves as the reference point to the ‘ordinary individual’. By being a visible class, in the public eye of media and ‘society’ it defines everyone else as private, as responsible for their own lives. As a rich class who do not have to worry for money, it defines everyone else as bound up with the grafting world of making a living. By being a powerful class it recognizes the relative powerless of everyone else. However, the reference to the upper class does more than this, since it partly unsettles the individualistic ethic itself. By recognizing that those in the upper class are not ‘normal individuals’, it raises the worrying prospect that people are not in fact so primordially ‘given’ as people might like to think. It is this tension that helps explain the ‘everywhere but nowhere’ references to class. It is not, as more recent writers have suggested, that people dis-identify with class (Skeggs, 1997). Rather, the idea of class is needed to sustain individualistic identities, but because it also disrupts it, it then is pushed back into the wings.

What we see here is a sense that the 'social' should not impinge on the 'natural'. This explains why a minority of the respondents were happy to defer to the upper class as born to rule because they saw their position as natural: it was in their 'blood'. It is also this which explains the remarkably numerous references to class divisions arising from relationships between 'lords and serfs'. Whereas few respondents related class to the social relations of industrial capitalism, numerous respondents were able to give a potted history of slavery and feudalism as an explanation of how class originated.

... in this country it stems from so far back. From the lords and barons, they graded them out so long ago they've never got over it. (114)

There's always been the serfs, the hobnobs and the rulers. Then again it started through education and heredity ... originally it started with landowners and started like that. The workers were never allowed to expand and they were just kept down. The Tolpuddle martyrs spoke up and they were deported. (115)

Its from way back – when some bod' owned a bit of land and it's come down. Way back, no doubt we were serfs, which no doubt we still are. For example, look at the Duke of Bedford – what's he? It's only what his dad left him ... those at the top fight to keep us down. (193)

The reason for these historical references is due to the desire to 'naturalize' class as an exogenous force over which respondents have little real say. The same process also explains the centrality of money, which could be seen as an externalized, 'objective' feature of social life, which people need in order to get by, but which is 'untainted' by personal or subjective factors. Precisely because money is impersonal, it is possible for people to be differentiated on the basis of how much money they have without this being deemed to undermine their individual, human, qualities. To define groups in terms of their cultural taste, or lifestyle would contaminate the human with the social, raising issues about whether there are morally better ways to live. Invoking money allows you to recognize social difference without overtly talking about different kinds of people. Here is one especially striking example:

... as far as I'm concerned everybody's got one head, one body, two arms and two legs. There's no difference between me and Lord Clare; he's got the money and I haven't. He may have a bit more brains, must have I suppose, but we're still equal in other parts. Even a roadsweeper's equal to me; I earn twice as much as he does but it doesn't make much difference to me, he's my equal. (33)

Because class raises issues about individual authenticity rather than about classifying occupational divisions, snobbery becomes a major concern. Goldthorpe et al. (1969: 152 fn 1) remarked on the strong distaste for snobbery among the sample, where 30 percent of the sample mentioned that snobs were the kind of people they felt awkward with – by far the largest category mentioned. Why did snobbery attract such universal dislike? It was not directly a class antagonism. Admittedly, some respondents identified a class dimension, with a non-snobbish (usually working) class juxtaposed against a 'snobbish' (middle) class, but most

did not. Rather, there seems a tension between ordinary, 'natural', individuals and those seen to be acting out of ulterior motives, those who were not frank and direct but who covered up their 'real', 'natural' predispositions for superficial, 'social' reasons. Snobbery implied the salience of social distinctions, and hence the inadmissible power of the social over the natural. Being a snob meant that you were not a 'real' person, who treated people on their merits, according to how they 'really' were, but rather that you were making false distinctions on the basis of social signifiers. A dislike of snobbery was thus extended into a broader attack on people who thought they were better than they were:

You find snobbishness everywhere – the biggest snobs are the most ignorant people ... they think by imitating you that they are better than they really are.

[Snobbery is] people who turn around and look at you as if you are a bit of dirt – they think they are the cat's whiskers. (14)

People just above you 'they're still working class. Some of them seem to get big ideas and think they're better, but to me they're not. It boils down to snobbishness. When people move up all I can see in it is just the snobbishness. They turn against you. You're not good enough for them. They won't mix with you. (20)

[Foremen] creep to the managers. There are others who stand on their own two feet. The average worker doesn't creep to anybody, he can stand on his own two feet and look after himself. [The 'creep class' are defined by] the way they dress, the way they talk. One man will take a taxi rather than wait for a bus. Probably does it just to impress people that he's got money. (42)

The reason why snobbishness is so powerfully felt lies in the power of the way that it defies the boundary between the social and the natural. Snobs do not act like people, but on the basis of their social position. This concern leads to a pre-occupation with how to better oneself, with many respondents being critical of the possibility of promotion (as indeed noted by Goldthorpe et al., and see also Savage, 1999). At one level, the possibility of promotion at work allowed those individuals who wanted to get ahead, get ahead, and was therefore seen as reasonable enough, indeed as part of a man's 'natural' concern to get on. Yet at another level it allowed the potential for those promoted to become snobs and desert their 'mates'.

We see in these reflections the complexity and internal tensions of a view of the world which was premised around the centrality of the primordial individual, who is not a social cipher, and is expected to differ because of their 'nature'. Social differentiation can be the reflection of such natural differences but also threatens to override them and displace individual differences with social ones, in which case snobbery is the result. The social hence slips in and out of these accounts: one cannot have primordial individuals without social difference, yet social difference no sooner appears in the account than it threatens to upset the prime emphasis on individuals. The rich classes are a special group of individuals who live according to different principles. This explains

why many of the sample feel no obvious resentment towards their privileges. Their antipathy is focused on those who are socially aspirant:

[On classes] [Y]ou must have them: it's a good thing. I think it would be boring if everyone was in the same class. You can pick up the paper and read what's happened to Lord Astor, Christine Keeler, etc and think, 'I wish that was me'. You'd have nothing to strive for, it would be boring. Some people must gain respect, doctors and surgeons. (61)

[Promotion is] like putting a doctor next to a dustman who has bags of money ... I don't like the word snob, but it's the only word I can think of – I don't think a lot of them are GENUINE people – like you know there are genuine music lovers who go to a prom and love every minute of it – while there are other people who go because it's the thing to do, but hate every minute of it. (32)

Conclusions

In this article I have shown how evidence from the affluent worker interviews can be read today to provide distinctive insights into class identities in the 1960s which have important ramifications for contemporary debates. To begin these conclusions, it is worth reiterating, once again, the impressive nature of the study itself. The authors were not wrong: Goldthorpe et al.'s refutation of claims that work relations and technologies determined workers' actions is in many respects underscored by my re-study. My emphasis about the power of individualist notions of class can be closely allied to their own stress on instrumentalism and the 'action frame of reference'.

However, with respect to their arguments about class identities, I have a critical rider to add. Goldthorpe et al.'s findings about the nature of class identities and the dominance of money models of society only stand up in the context of the analytical categories they deployed, namely the distinction between money, power and status models of society. Although the data can be interpreted in these terms, this unhelpfully obscures the close association between these axes in the minds of the respondents. More generally, conceptions of class do not usually arise from the social relations of work and community in the way intimated by Bott and Lockwood, and this explains why this tradition of research into working-class images of society ran aground. It is certainly possible to see why sociologists of stratification gave up studying class identities in the 1970s: the evident frustration of the sociologists involved in the Affluent Worker Study are marked clearly enough in their interview schedules when respondents failed to answer their questions in what they thought were 'appropriate' ways. However, today we might instead look more critically at the limitations of that tradition of sociological inquiry itself, and return to the data with a different set of questions and interests. Here, we can argue that people's conceptions of class need to be understood as anchored in people's understandings of what it is to be an 'ordinary' individual, with 'natural' attributes.

My excavation of the views of 1960s affluent workers show how the idea of class is a necessary, though also shadowy, concomitant of people's individualism. What my re-analysis shows, is that this individualistic framework demands a particular conception of relationality and class (see generally, Strathern, 1990). Individualistic and class identities do not compete, but articulate one with another (see also Savage, 1999, 2000). I have argued that there are two main processes at work here. First, the concern of affluent workers to define themselves as ordinary individuals entails contrasting themselves with an upper class, not truly individuals in the same way. And by understanding themselves as different from this upper class, the affluent workers define the key features of individuality in terms of having to make their own living. Second, there is also a relational contrast between the 'natural' and the 'social'. Those people who do not act naturally but out of social considerations are disdained. These might include the upper or middle classes, but it is more likely that they are those people who act out of false, 'social' motives. Again, as with the contrast with the upper class, respondents can feel better about their individuality because of its contrast with the actions of snobs. From both these different kinds of comparison, the social is at one moment registered and at the next displaced. The language of class is necessary to understand who is not really an individual. But taking it too seriously would entail upsetting the primordial individualism implicated in this way of thinking. This offers an alternative to the analysis of class identities offered in recent studies by Skeggs (1997) and Charlesworth (2000) who both use Bourdieu's arguments to argue that people actively dis-identify from class, as a marker of the power of class. Such an approach runs the risk of re-instating a 'false consciousness' problematic, where sociologists define what people should think.

My interpretation of affluent worker's images of society, if true, has some telling implications, and suggests certain constants and continuities in popular identities. It suggests that the Luton affluent workers might not have been so distinct from other groups within the working class which were researched at the same time and where there is evidence that respondents recognized power divisions (see Cousins and Brown, 1975, for instance). The way that the Luton workers identified an affluent upper class as the most visible class in Britain, and their identification of themselves as having relatively little money compared to such groups, clearly indicates a sense of relative deprivation. It also helps explain why working-class identities have persisted even in the contemporary period of de-industrialization and the decline of manual employment. Because working-class identities are not linked to particular work experiences but rather to an emphasis on being 'ordinary individuals', there is no reason why they cannot persist among more contemporary, middle-class samples, as found in my own research (Savage et al., 2001) in our study of class identities in Greater Manchester.

However, alongside these similarities, there is one striking difference from the findings of more recent studies. A central theme in the research of female working-class identities by Reay (1998), Charlesworth (2000), Lawler (2000)

and Skeggs (2004) is the idea that the 'self' is a fragile, fraught and classed construction. The ability to define oneself as a 'real' individual is a classed process, which many, especially working-class women, find difficult. We have seen that in the affluent worker fieldnotes there is little direct reference to this kind of process, at least explicitly. This may reflect the gender bias of the study. It may also be consistent with a subtle redrawing of the cultural boundaries between the social and natural in the past 40 years.

My final point is methodological. There is a genuine difficulty in knowing whether the kind of claims made about the extent of changing popular identities, such as those of individualization, post materialism and the like reflect the different orientations and perspectives of sociologists and other scholars, rather than any shift in measurable popular attitudes and values themselves. I hope I have shown that the secondary analysis of archived qualitative data can be used to shed new insights on this issue, in ways which complicate and qualify any simple accounts of epochal change.

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Notes

- 1 I am grateful to John Goldthorpe, in a personal communication, for his advice here.
- 2 I am grateful to both Jennifer Platt and John Goldthorpe for their observations on this point.
- 3 As Jennifer Platt (1984) notes, it is strange in the context of statements such as this that the study was criticized at the time for its apparent anti-Marxism.
- 4 Two interviews have been lost. The relevant material is held in boxes 8–12, with the interview number indicated in brackets after the quotes.
- 5 Bracketed, underlined, text indicates notes written by the interviewer on the questionnaire.
- 6 The precise identity of the interviewer is not revealed by the fieldnotes, which have been anonymized. In any event, the point here is not about the quality or characteristics of any particular interviewer but about the structural relationships between the researchers and the respondents more generally.

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