Class Cultures: What is meant by 'Class'?

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Introduction

Some of the most deplorable scenes in Karl Marx's *Capital* (1867) are found in Chapter 15 entitled 'Machinery and Modern Industry'. Regarding brickmaking (§ 8A, ¶ 1-2), primary-age school children toil in clay pits carrying as much as 10 tonnes of clay up 30 metre steep sides. They are dressed in rags offering no protection since little else can be afforded. The working day is long (12 or more hours) to meet quotas their parents have been contracted to deliver. The parents barely earn enough to sustain themselves, never mind several children. Yet, the more children these 'parents'[1] bring to market, the better-off they, themselves, might be.

Marx gives many other examples besides brickmaking, including rag sorting (to produce paper), cotton manufacture, lacemaking, and mining. He chose these examples several reasons. First, there is the direct contrast with the title of the chapter ('Machinery and **Modern** Industry'). The reason whole families slaved in such harsh conditions was, indeed, due to **technological progress**. New innovations and 'advancements' in machinery meant commodities were made cheaper and at larger scale, throwing redundant workers into precarious alternative work.

By the 1860s bricks were produced in massive industrial kilns, then transported by rail. Yet, the number of bricks produced still lagged behind burgeoning demand due to urban growth and, with the expansion of the market, a Leviathan (monster) began to consume increasing amounts of clay – the required raw material. Clay production (and many other raw material industries) had not yet been mechanised, and the situation created 'demand' for child labour to fill shortages in these 'new' unskilled sectors as society 'progressed'. Marx draws out the social effects of an **imbalance** in industrialisation, such that 'progress' is also 'regress'.[2]

[1] The children may be borrowed from relatives. Hence, 'parents' appears between inverted commas.

[2] Similar outcomes of uneven development are found in our contemporary world. Children mine cobalt (and other minerals) in Congo due to the demand for batteries in the 'developed' world. These children's ancestors faced similar conditions (and much worse) when the invention of the pneumatic tire led to a demand for bicycles (late 19th century) and an explosion in the amount of rubber to be farmed in Belgian Congo (actually the personal possession of King Leopold III).

Second, Marx makes it clear that these children are being **exploited** by their (desperate) **parents**. Yes, readers are aware the parents are also being exploited by someone else but, in this instance, they undertake the direct exploitation of the child. This is not just referring to their managerial role (administrators of beatings; setters of a child's 'wage rate'). Rather, in the technical language Marx has set out in prior chapters, the parents take (or **alienate**) a part of the product (surplus product, and thus **surplus value**) created by the child's work.

Part of what the parents 'take' is then appropriated (alienated) by someone else. Nevertheless, Marx wants us to see that the parents are part of the **exploitative class** and that, in this instance, there can be no middle ground. There is no 'middle' class who are 'both' exploiter and exploited – once you exploit you are a member of the exploitative class, or those who **share** in the forced appropriation of time and products from others.[3] These conditions of classification are mutually exclusive, and Marx wants us to side with the children (the exploited) – everyone else in the scene is an exploiter and part of a 'single' **class** (mode or form) **of exploitation** (as far as the children and 'us' – the readers – should be concerned).[4]

This leaves many approaches to, and analyses of, **social class** with a problem. Should the parents be seen as working-class or as capitalists? Well, the clay pits example jars with a technical / conceptual definition Marx provided in an earlier chapter (7) of *Capital*, where he indicates that a person is only a **capitalist** if they have sufficient financial resources to avoid selling their own labour power to another (work for wages). That is, the capitalist must be financially 'independent' which means living-off nothing but various forms of surplus value (profit, interest, rents, rights, taxes, or any other form of surplus value: taking an unearned cut or 'share'). This leaves our clay pit parents in a fuzzy position; they are part and parcel of the **exploitative class** (which supports and sustains the existing social system) but hardly meet the criteria to be 'capitalists' (the parents worked alongside their children, with part of their 'work' being managerial – the administration of beatings). To sum up, we now have people who are part of the 'capitalist **class**' but are not **capitalists**!

We can see the parents as 'wannabes' or 'fellow travellers' (or as wage slaves who want to become masters) but in their desire (and calculations) to acquire surplus value ('make money') they fulfil the mission statement and uphold the values of bourgeois society. They may share **a capacity to exploit** with others, like Egyptian Pharos and Priests, Romanian Boyars, or Scottish Clan Chiefs, but the manner or **form** in which they do this is historically distinct, taking place under a modern highly-specialised division of labour, through which the parents (and, of course, their children) 'produce' for the market. The ancient Pharos were a different **class** of exploiter – meaning they were part of a quite different **form** (**mode**, or class) of social organisation.

From this opening example it is possible to note and analyse the distinct ways in which the term **class** (short for 'social class') is used. Yet, much discussion in contemporary social sciences (sociology, social policy, political science, economics) fails to mention such disparate meanings and intentions, and uses the term 'class' on the basis that its meaning is both shared (with readers) and commonly 'understood'. I find this assumption irksome. It overlooks so much of what is important when it comes to the **sociology** of class. Hence, my paper aims to break down this 'culture' of talking about class and, therein, highlight the multitude of cultures (plural) which exist beyond the

[3] I have emboldened the term 'share' since this is how Adam Smith describes the master's (or stockholder's) expropriation of surplus labour in *The Wealth of Nations*. For Smith, workers produce the entire value of the product for sale, in which the stockholder 'shares' (See the opening of Chapter 6, *Wealth of Nations*).
[4] This is a question of analysis and not sympathy (or empathy). As Smith notes in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, we can sympathise with a person's position, yet not agree with them (see Gunn, 2011).

hegemonic (universal or dominant) assumption that class simply refers to a group of people an individual 'belongs' to.

Section 1: Questioning the Meaning of 'Class'

What is meant by social 'class' in wider society, outside of 'sociology'? Typically, the term is taken to refer to **social status** and/or **rank**, referring to an individual's identification with a position or place in a **hierarchy**. The simplest form of talking about 'class' in everyday British life is when people refer to **upper, middle,** and **lower** classes. Or, if you like, whether you are at the top of British society, at the bottom, or somewhere in-between.

This kind of understanding has been the focus of self-deprecating comedy in British culture. In the 1930s, a newspaper cartoon depicted three men climbing a ladder against the side of a ship. They wanted to get on board and, presumably, to safety.[5] The cartoon was reacting to the Wall Street Crash (1929) and Great Depression (1929-33) which affected all industrialised economies (including the UK). The man nearest the top of the ladder – above the other two – is saying: "It's no good, we are **all** going to have to take one step down". Readers would pick up that he is arguing for everyone to take a cut in their income (make the sacrifice of accepting austerity) due to the economic recession. This man is depicted wearing a 'top hat' and 'tails' to show he is upper-class. The next man wears a pin-stripe suit and a 'bowler' hat; he is middle-class. This man's legs are already in the water, up to his knees. Finally, the third man wears a 'flat cap' and white shirt (no jacket); he is lower (working) class. Only his head and shoulders are currently above the water. The implication is clear – one step down would have no effect on the upper-class man, but the lower-class man would drown!

Similarly, in the early 1960s, BBC TV used *The Class Sketch* (with comedians John Cleese, Ronnie Barker, and Ronnie Corbett) to criticise Britain's system of social class using the same 3-class representation.[6] To make the joke, each class of person was represented by the height of each comedian. The criticism was that people could be considered socially superior or inferior depending upon their relative height! Well, why not? Don't the distinctions made between 'social classes' (and an individual's **status**) rely on equally arbitrary personal characteristics (tone of voice; preferred beverage)?

The underlying connotation declares 'social class' to be a **subdivision** of wider **society** where an individual belongs to one of three groups. Most often, these groupings reflect peoples' **occupations** and, concomitant, access to **resources**, but not in detail. Whilst lower, middle, and upper are the predominant adjectives, other terms can be used, such as **elite** or nobility for the upper class and **working classes** for the lower. And further distinctions, used by government and academics to refine differences within the three main classes, can be found in popular discourse, such as **upper middle class** (for senior managers, doctors, and other professionals), or **labour aristocracy** (for the best paid manual workers), and even **underclass** (unemployed, paupers).

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[5] A contemporary version of this cartoon, by Ella Furness, is available in a blog by Danny Dorling (2016) Why Britain's class system will have to change (theconversation.com). This cartoon features a fourth character, a woman beneath the working-class man!

[6] Though differently since dress fashion had changed. This time the upper-class man (John Cleese) had bowler hat, the middle class one (Ronnie Barker) wore a trilby, though the working-class man (Ronnie Corbett) was still depicted with a flat cap. To see this image, visit: Judicial decision making: 8.2 The judicial hierarchy | OpenLearn - Open University.

Once this conceptualisation of class is accepted, then increasing or decreasing the numbers of 'classes' appears feasible. In 2012, the UK government and BBC adopted a 7-class system, whilst (famously) Marx argued that capitalism was driving towards a system of only 2 distinct classes (the **bourgeoisie** and the **proletariat**). Given the ability of the 2012 approach to reflect actual 'history' and not a 'projection', this leads to the question: wasn't Marx's 'prophecy' (in *The Communist Manifesto*, 1872) wrong? However, in the latter question lies a problem in so far as one understanding of 'class' (one culture of class) is being superimposed on another. As we have seen, for Marx there was no middle ground in a system of exploitation where people either exploit or are exploited.

Questions:
Have you experienced class-based discrimination in your own life?
What kind of goods (consumables) and symbols indicate a person's 'class'?

Section 2: Defining 'class' in sociology: Group, Division & Vision

'Class' is often shorthand for **socio-economic classification** but is used in several ways across sociology by different thinkers and approaches (empirical versus phenomenological[7] methods). As noted above, 'class' is typically assumed to refer to a **group** of individuals who share common traits, and hence a group identity within a hierarchy. But it can also refer to a **division** amongst people caused by a social process or **conflict** (an approach notable in the work of Max Weber, not just Marx) which gives people mutually exclusive interests. An example would be buyers and sellers within a market, where the process of exchange generates opposing interests (workers and capitalists over the wage rate). Furthermore, the term 'class' may be applied to an entire 'society' (or mode of production) and **belief system**, as in capitalism versus feudalism, socialism, fascism, or communism. With the latter, the term **capitalist class** refers to anyone who supports capitalism over any others (feudalism to communism), regardless of their social status within capitalism.

Consequently, people may be divided into seers and non-seers (enlightened/unenlightened; conscious/unconscious) as to whether an existing social system (class) is replaceable. An emerging or rising 'class' is represented, or made distinct, by its **vision** for a new form of social organisation (against existing arrangements and competing visions). For instance, capitalism brought with it a 'new way' of organising production (and thus **social reproduction**). Capitalism was and is 'revolutionary' in this sense – and it continues to overturn pre-existing modes (classes) of production wherever it goes (invades).

However, to envision 'capitalism' as the only option available is a perspective which closes off and **denies** the existence of other possibilities (other classes) available at the time, producing an account that the philosopher Karl Popper calls **historicist** (that is, determinist), in the sense that history had to turn out this way. However, that capitalism 'exists' is a product not only of struggle against alternatives in the past but of on-going struggles to work-out, in the present, which **system** ('class') of social reproduction is "the best of all possible worlds" (Manuel & Manuel's 1979 definition of 'utopia'). 'Class' analysis is 'form analysis' that simply recognises or acknowledges we aren't 'done'

[7] 'Phenomenological' means *experiential*. Therefore, whilst an empirical approach might count the numbers of individuals in different classes, an experiential approach will ask people what it is like to be a member of a specific class (what is it like to live as part of their class).

yet. Meanwhile, thinking that capitalism is irreplaceable denies the existence of 'class' (in the sense that alternates become 'impossible'). Interestingly, as cultural critic Frederic Jameson has pointed out, it becomes easier for us to imagine the end of the world (totality) than it is to imagine the end of capitalism (a mere 'class' or partiality)!

Now let's return to each concept of class (Group / Division / Vision) in more depth.

A. 'Class' as a Group and Group Identity

Starting from the view that **individuals** are 'members' of or belong to a **group** (a category or a classification), other questions follow. For instance, can the group can be **self-defining** (i.e., can the group decide who is a member or to be included in the group) or is the group being **externally defined** (by location or place within a system, by income or earnings, by access to resources, through social connections to others, or by exclusion from another group), and to what extent are both processes involved?

These questions indicate the extent to which class 'groupings' are not static but living, moving entities. Of course, elites (with resources and connections) have more **opportunity** to define who belongs in their group (e.g., using 'snobbery' or the 'law'), but lower classes can also use 'reverse snobbery' to exclude those in superior positions. Max Weber uses 'market positioning' to describe how groups (classes) compete with each other for **social status**. Even the less well-off classes will look to position themselves 'above' other groups (e.g., indigenous working class against incomers / migrants) and the employed ('hard working') will do the same against the unemployed, paupers or vagrants. Such **identities** are always a mixture of inclusion and exclusion and 'definition' is often oppositional or relational.

B. 'Class' as division

The opening line of *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx & Engels, 1846/1872) mentions **class struggle** before any specific **classes** are introduced, and the 'order of presentation' of concepts is important (Gunn, 1987). That is, conflict and struggle come first, out of which different (opposing) classes then emerge. Marx and Engels give the examples of master and slave, lord and serf, and finally capitalist and wage labourer. In this context, class is shaped by a person's **relationship to a process** (owner of capital versus owner of nothing except their own labour power) and not by identity traits (language, clothes, ethnicity, *etc.*). And acquiring **capital** (gaining sufficient money to support oneself without the need to perform wage labour) represents a **shift in class position**. Hence, individuals may change class without changing cultural aspects. Meanwhile, 'modern' workers may think of themselves as 'middle' class but, if they still need to sell their labour power to survive, then they remain **wage labourers**. Also of importance is the manner in which the class **division** runs through the individual, in effect dividing the individual within (themselves) as much as it (at the same time) divides one individual from another. Richard Gunn (1987) developed the following diagram (Figure 1) as a means of summing these issues in a visual manner:

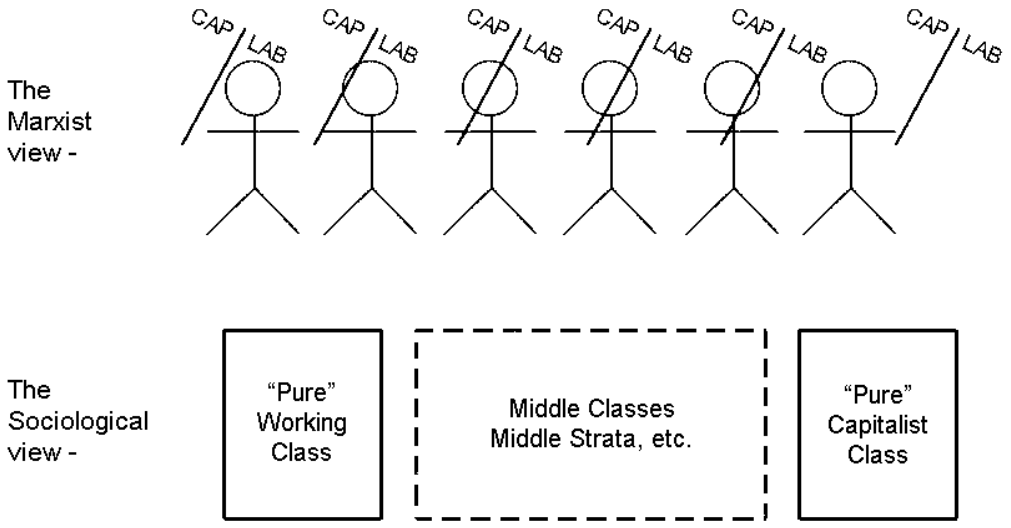

Figure 1: The Marxist view of 'Class' versus the standard Sociological view (from Gunn, 1987).

Note in the diagram how the individuals in the 'middle' (top line) are still divided by only two interests, and this is what Marx meant by modern capitalism evolving into only two 'classes' (as interests). In a previous era (during Adam Smith's time), a third interest existed, namely, traditional land ownership, where 'rent' did not take the form of money (rather it entailed the taking of 'quick rent' in the form of produce like grain). But once land rent was monetized, Marx describes the landowning class as being **subsumed** into the (monetised) capitalist one, *leaving* only two classes (from the starting point of Smith's three classes: wage labour, stockholders, and landowners).

C. 'Class' as vision

As already noted, the word 'class' can also be used to refer to an entire **mode** of production (e.g., capitalist society). In this sense, the phrase **capitalist class** refers to more than the elite group who own capital – it refers to all those who believe in or take capitalist (or 'waged labour') relations of production for granted (something known as **hegemonic** identity). **Class consciousness**, or awareness, then refers to people who see and promote **alternative** modes of production (e.g., socialism as a newly possible 'class' of society). Marx sometimes uses 'capitalist class' and 'capitalist mode of production' interchangeably – a **class** *is* a **mode** of production**.** He even uses the phrase **'class exists in the mode of being denied'** (see Gunn, 1987)**.** The latter can be read in two ways: (a) the existence of social class means **denying** some people resources (they exist in a form of social relationship which denies them – including both *status* as free-born citizen, or property owner, and *resources*, such as land or food), and (b) the *concept* of 'class' is often **denied** (i.e., a dominant class denies that alternative modes of production are possible **and** also claims that people are not socially divided – e.g., the people are 'one' nation or race).

Class identity plays a role here, but not in the sense of identifying with an existing group or the 'rank' one is born into. For instance, Tony Benn (1925-2014) was a left-wing British politician. He was born into the nobility (elite landowning class), but gave up his peerage (lordship) so he could sit in the elected House of Commons. Benn **identified** himself as a socialist and ardently believed in an alternate mode of production to capitalism. Such a case raises many questions. Which class did he 'belong' to? Should we take his own understanding of himself into account? Is it possible to identify with an entity or outcome (a 'class' or 'mode' of production) that does not yet exist? Or does this entail identifying with openness, whereby what we acknowledge or recognise is the freedom of

others (in the future) to decide for themselves? Is it possible to envision such a liberatory / emancipatory space, a 'class' (mode) of production, which is beyond 'class' division and conflicts?

D. Objective and subjective understandings of class

As noted above, individuals can be placed in a 'class' (defined externally) or may identify with a 'class' (self-identify). Placing individuals into a 'class' using externally defined criteria is known as an **objective** approach – individuals have no choice in the matter and are being treated as 'objects'. This approach uses some means of constant measure (e.g., income or occupation), and is typically viewed as **empirical**. You 'belong' to a specific class depending on your occupation and/or income – it has nothing to do with how you feel, think, act, or behave (what you might identify with).

An alternative approach to researching 'class' is to ask which class individuals think they belong to (how do they feel about the concept of social classes?). This is a **subjective** approach as it considers what people think of themselves (and others) and is sometimes known as **phenomenological** (where Greek *phenomena* means 'experience' whilst *logos* means 'word'). Phenomenology is literally the 'words of experience' or study / interpretation of experience.

During the 1980s a number of British sociologists (e.g., Goldberg) claimed social class was losing its **cultural relevance** in British society (which had previously been marked by a prevalent **class system**). They argued that 'the working class', in particular, was dying as an **identity**, as more workers saw themselves as 'middle class'. It is one example of work emphasising a purely subjective approach to understanding social class.

Questions:
What class do you think you belong to and why?
Is this a subjective or objective assessment?

Section 3: Class, Resources & 'Capitals'

How does class relate to **resource** availability? Clearly socio-economic processes have **consequences** for individuals and communities – "It's the economy, stupid!". The lowest paid workers **cannot afford** the kinds of things that the best paid can, such as houses with gardens, new cars, expensive clothes and jewellery, high quality food and restaurants, or the best seats in the theatre or cinema.

Subsequently, social classes are 'marked' by cultural and social **outcomes and symbols** (or 'signs'). Cultural and social **aspiration** (to become an 'equal' amongst others) means that poorer individuals / classes try to emulate or 'ape' those who are better off.[8] This makes sense within the social structures they are born into and socialised by. But in the same move those who are 'better off' typically try to maintain a **distinction** between themselves and **others**.[9] Again, this makes sense

[8] As noted above, slaves often want to become their masters, and thereby own slaves. Such an outcome was fairly common in ancient slave-owning systems (e.g., a Roman slave could enlist in the Roman army, gain their freedom by displaying bravery in battle, and rise through the ranks of society).
[9] Hence, it is said that the Inca elite ate the tongues of Humming Birds (worthless as protein, being so small). They did so because the tongues were hard to obtain, and thus only an elite could eat them. In the United Kingdom, only Royalty can eat swans. The American economist Thorsten Veblen made his name from studying 'conspicuous consumption' – undertaken to sustain distinction and distance.

inside a social structure where access to resources (now and in the future) is based on hierarchical status. Hence, conceptions of 'class' are often bound up with **consumption** in a society dominated by commodity exchange (i.e., markets).

A. Bauman on Consumer Society

In his work of the 1980s and 90s, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017) claimed modern **consumer society** was divided into two main classes: **the seduced** and **the repressed**. These classes, Bauman argued, had replaced older identities based on occupation (or work) in an **industrial society**. The new classes were based on **consumer identities** within a **consumer society** – what people could purchase and afford to consume. Importantly, access to cheap **credit** was one means by which 'the seduced' (those in regular jobs with access to **finance**) could sustain a **lifestyle** similar to celebrities and elites – though they were **indebting** themselves to a future of endless work. By contrast, 'the repressed' covered all those **others** cut out of consumer society, being denied access to decent, regular wages and credit – those on fixed benefits (unemployed; disabled), on pensions, or in poorly paid **dead-end jobs**.

One key argument from this 'consumer society' approach is that people pay less attention to what people 'do' (their work, training, job) and focus much more on what they 'have' (clothes, house, car). Yet, 'class' remains important, and consumer society is not 'classless' and does not reduce the experience of living with class distinctions. Access to resources provides an immediate guide to a person's 'class' (as in group category or identity), though such divergent access to resources can exist over a lifetime meaning that 'having' (or not) shapes character and behaviour.

B. Bourdieu on class 'Habitus'

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002; French) is a significant thinker in creating the concept of 'capitals', namely, **social, cultural** and **symbolic capital**. His work focused on power dynamics within society and the manner in which, ever so subtly, **capacities (power)** are **transferred across generations**. As such, social 'classes' are generated and recreated through the inheritance of elements such as language (accent / dialect / vocabulary), contacts (who your family 'knows'), cultural knowledge and exposure (to opera and jazz music / visits to art galleries) in addition to traditional concepts of property and financial inheritance (a house / bank accounts / company shares).

Bourdieu discusses these issues in terms of class **habitus**, based on a **theory of action**. Namely, social agents (an active element) adopt and adapt behaviours best suited to the situation they inhabit, or find themselves in. Consequently, 'class' is a lived and performed creative process. It is an **embodied** process, meaning it is not reliant (merely) on conscious awareness. Habitus is similar to 'socialisation' but emphasises **self-socialisation** – a more *active* element. For example, why do you prefer the music that you do? Is this a true personal choice or has it been subtly influenced by family, peers, and social messages (about what is good and bad)? It is feasible (easy) to reason that you have been 'socialised' into liking certain music, but at the same time **tastes** (for music and food) are so personal it is clear individuals make choices. Yes, they are 'habituated', but Bourdieu's core point is that self-habituation has played a core role in the process.

C. An example on class habitus?

A **class habitus** would include things such as the food you choose to eat, and the manner in which this is repetitive. A post-grad student I once taught (who had a first degree in Environmental Science) gave me the following example: when we are hungry our bodies get **cravings** – these can be

specific, for something salty or sweet or bitter or tart. Our **bodies** are telling us what they need. However, if our body has a craving for something bitter, it cannot crave something it has never had. Thus, children in poorer parts of Glasgow will not get a craving for broccoli, if they have never experienced eating broccoli (at one point viewed as a middle/upper class food, as with avocados). Hence, poor or limited diet in working class areas of Scottish cities is not simply about lack of money (though that plays a role) but cultural repetition in behaviours and actions, handed down from one generation to the next.

D. The concepts of 'capitals' (financial; social; cultural)

From Bourdieu's work, the concept of different kinds of 'capital' has been adopted. **Financial capital** refers to the traditional understanding of capital as money (or a store of money or property which is used to purchase the efforts of others – a definition Adam Smith would have been familiar with). But beyond this traditional **financial capital**, Bourdieu wants us to think in the following terms:

1. **Social capital** refers to connections and communicative ability, such as lists of contacts of people with power (capacities and skills to help) or the ability to charm (use charisma).
2. **Cultural capital** refers to techniques (artistic as well as scientific) and ability to interpret instructions and messages (e.g., 'getting' jazz music or reading mathematic equations).
3. **Symbolic capital** covers a vast array of things, but most notable are titles, badges and brands (i.e. owning a brand or having a good reputation).

E. Class and life opportunities and outcomes

These categories (the levels or amounts of different 'capitals' you possess) can then be examined or tested in a survey, such as the BBC's Great British Class Calculator (Kerley, 2015). Depending on how you score on each parameter (how much social capital you have compared to cultural capital, etc.), you are placed into one of 7 class categories (namely, 1. Precariat, 2. Emergent Service Workers, 3. Traditional Working Class, 4. New Affluent Workers, 5. Technical Middle Class, 6. Established Middle Class, 7. Elite).

Clearly, **social class** makes people as much as they 'make' (or form) their identity within a class – the survey helps to highlight the on-going importance of 'class' within British society (and other modern societies). The approach does make links between access to financial capital (income / property) and other **significant personal attributes**, such as **soft power** in the form and use of symbolic, social and cultural capitals. Bourdieu's work indicates the processes through which such attributes are handed-down (transferred) across generations.

F. Criticisms of Habitus

However, the approach is reductive in the sense that no two individuals are alike – and 'class' does not always define personal opportunity. The latter is connected to the way in which the survey 'fixes' what is and is not culturally or socially important (e.g., why should liking jazz or classical music help to make someone 'elite' – aren't there rich rappers?). The Elite come out as having everything, but they lack the **experience** of being poor, and all the people they 'know' may just be acquaintances (**sycophants** who want their 'money' and to use their influence), and not real **friends**. There are many social dimensions to 'class' (as **habitus**) which the survey fails to pick up on.

Also, going back to the earlier diagram by Gunn (1987), Bourdieu's approach, despite offering the concept of **habits clive** (a feeling of being wrenched from one's original habits) more generally fails to consider the extent to which anyone (any individual) is **class conflicted** – that is, they are divided

between ‘classes’, and are confronted with making choices about which path or action to take (not ‘identity’ to hold on to).

And, going back even further to the start of this article, considering Marx’s examples, Bourdieu also seems to have lost sight of **class exploitation**, which is quite a different thing from ‘struggling’ to claim an identity or social status (*a la* Weber’s **market positioning**). A parent, ‘sharing’ in the exploitation of their child, may desire a social status they are denied or refused (due to rejection from those above them in the social pecking order) but they are, nevertheless, coming down on one side of the exploitative process – as an exploiter.

Questions:
How useful do you find these modern interpretations of ‘class’ by Bauman and Bourdieu?
What criticisms of your own, if any, do you see in such an approach / system?

Conclusion

All too often people enter into a discussion of social class with simplified conceptions of the term. Hopefully, this paper has indicated how **complex** using ‘class’ is. It is more than a single ‘concept’ and typical forms part of a culture or way of talking about social classes. To turn Bourdieu’s concept of habitus in on itself, the sociologist is just as prone to forming a class habitus when it comes to discussing the very nature of ‘class’ – it’s something they just get used to, taking understandings for granted. Therein lies both the million-dollar question and its answer – how do we change this culture, and for the better?

[Word Count: 5,229]

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