# Social Class and Stratification in Late Modernity

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ABSTRACT
Social changes associated with late modernity have led many to question the continuing relevance of class analysis. This paper shows that, far from being dead, class remains an important analytical tool. This is shown in relation to the constitution of economic classes, the causal effects of class situations, the formation of social classes, and patterns of class awareness. It is argued that economic class divisions can still be identified and that they continue to exercise a major impact on life chances. Nevertheless, class effects must be considered alongside other, partially offsetting, causal effects, and this means that patterns of social class formation are looser than in the past. People continue to recognise the existence of economic and social class divisions, but they are likely to supplement this with other lifestyle factors in constituting their social identities.

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## 1. Introduction

Entry into a new century, let alone a new millennium, is an appropriate point at which to reconsider the relevance of class in the contemporary world. From the late 18th century, class had been seen, almost without question, as the key to understanding the dynamics of the modern world. In the last third of the 20th century, however, challenges to class analysis became an ever stronger feature of sociological argument (see Clark & Lipset 1991; Pakulski & Waters 1996). Class, it was claimed, is dead, made extinct by the development of postcapitalist, postindustrial and postmodern social processes. Paradoxically, this was also the point at which, after long and fruitless confrontations between Marxist, Weberian and functionalist theories, the leading class analysts began to put together a more sophisticated approach to class analysis. Beneath the surface of this dispute, a clear and defensible strategy for class analysis had emerged and now deserves to reclaim its place as a central element in the sociological toolbox. This work is not without its problems, of course. We are at a crossroads in stratification studies, and a review of the possibilities, and the limitations, of class analysis can help to point the way forward.

The critics of class analysis have not got it all wrong: there is, indeed, a great deal in what they say. Class analysis does not provide a complete framework for social analysis, but this does not mean that it must be abandoned. There is something more to stratification than just class, and this 'something more' needs to be properly theorized and analysed. Nevertheless, contemporary forms of inequality must still be understood, also, through the concepts of classical stratification theory. I seek to show that critics of class analysis have correctly highlighted the dissolution of class identities and long-established forms of class consciousness. However, they have overstated the significance of this for class relations themselves. We are witnessing not so much the death of class as a restructuring of class relations and their supplementation by new sources of social division and social identity. Class relations still exist and exert an effect on life chances and conditions of living, so there is still a role for appropriate forms of class analysis. I shall develop this argument through considering four key questions. First, is the question of the constitution of class situations

and classes at the economic level. This concerns the number and boundaries of economic classes and the particular property and employment relations that define them. Secondly, is the question of the continuing relevance of these class situations as causal components in the lives of their members. This concerns the causal powers that are involved in the various class situations and the extent to which people's life chances and ways of living are affected by them. Thirdly, is the question of social class formation. This concerns the extent to which economic classes are formed into social classes through processes of mobility and association and, therefore, the 'openness' that characterizes the class hierarchy. Fourthly, is the question of class awareness and class identity. This concerns the extent to which clear-cut class imagery prevails and whether it shapes the wider consciousness and action of people.[1]

## 2. Constituting economic classes

The first of these questions concerns the criteria needed to operationalize 'class situation', the number of divisions that can be made using these criteria and the membership of the resulting economic classes. Discussions of class differ along a number of theoretical dimensions, but the leading researchers hold to a broadly Weberian conception of what class actually involves (Weber [1914] 1968a, [1920] 1968b; see also Scott 1996). From this point of view, class relations are the outcome of the distribution of property and other resources in capital, product and labour markets. Class divisions arise from the possession and lack of possession of property and the employment relations that follow from this. What Weber called 'class situations' exist wherever property and employment relations generate specific capacities or powers to acquire income and assets and so to enhance or diminish life chances. A Weberian position further implies that it is only where clusters of class situations are reinforced and solidified by relations of mobility and association that it is possible to speak of *social* classes as distinct from purely economic classes. A social class is a demographic cluster of households whose members owe their life chances principally to the specific property ownership or employment relations that constitute their class situations.

For all the dispute that there has been over the measurement of class, there is a growing recognition that the so-called 'Goldthorpe' (1987) scheme offers the most useful implementation of this approach to class analysis, although many areas of contention remain over its details.[2] Versions of this have been used in comparative investigations of social mobility carried out by John Goldthorpe and Robert Erikson, it has been slightly modified for official use in Britain and it is beginning to receive wide international support. It does not, however, go unchallenged. Its main rival has been the Wright class scheme (Wright 1985, 1989, 1997), employed for US data and in a comparative project that, despite its Marxist origins, has much in common with Goldthorpe's. Most recently, comparative research has also been undertaken using an alternative scheme proposed by Esping-Andersen (1993).

Goldthorpe's scheme originated in a critical study of working class embourgeoisement, the 'Affluent Worker' project (Goldthorpe et al. 1968a, b, 1969). Goldthorpe and his colleagues were firmly of the opinion that purely economic criteria had to be used in defining class situations, and that these issues had to be distinguished from those of reputation and social standing that Weber called 'status situation'. Lockwood ([1958] 1993) had earlier broken down class situation into the two components of 'market situation' and 'work situation'. The market situation for a particular type of work comprises the conditions of employment that typically characterize it, most particularly source and level of income, degree of economic security and chances of economic advancement. Work situation is the location of that work in the prevailing systems of authority and control (Goldthorpe 1987:40).[3]

In the most developed account of this scheme, Erikson & Goldthorpe (1993:37) hold that class situations can be distinguished by the employment relations through which forms of work are organized. These employment relations involve positions within labour markets (market situations) and positions of authority within production units (work situations). They see the employment relations of advanced capitalist societies as defining three basic class situations: the employers, the employed and the self-employed. Employers purchase the labour of others and, through labour contracts, exercise authority and control in the production process. Employees sell their labour power to others and so become subject to authority and control at work. Finally, the self-employed neither buy nor sell the labour of others but work on their own account.[4] Wright (1997:13), using Marxist

terms, makes a broadly similar, although not identical, distinction between 'capitalists', 'workers' and the 'petty bourgeoisie' as the three principal economic classes.[5] The simple tripartite scheme, however, can rarely be put to empirical use as it stands. Nineteenth century capitalist societies may have approximated to such a three-class scheme, but this is certainly not the case for the late 20th century. The basic class situations of employer and employee must, therefore, be differentiated to reflect the emergence of progressively more complex structurings of work and employment.

Where employment was formerly given or withheld by individual entrepreneurial capitalists, most employees are now employed by corporate organizations, and Erikson and Goldthorpe allude to what Berle and Means (1932) called a separation of ownership from control in capitalist businesses. This means, they argue, that large entrepreneurial proprietors have all but disappeared, and owner–employers have become irrelevant to employment in large organizations. The 'employers' are now mainly small business owners (the petite bourgeoisie) and owner–occupier farmers. This claim, however, can be challenged on empirical grounds (Scott 1997). The changing structure of ownership in large enterprises has not led to the complete disappearance of substantial shareholders, even if many of them no longer participate directly in controlling the enterprises in which they own shares. Large shareholders may not be 'employers' in the conventional sense, but their wealth and their dividend incomes make that class situation quite distinct from those of salaried managers and the petite bourgeoisie.[6] The property that they have, which can be bought and sold on the capital market, is minimized by Goldthorpe's overconcentration on the labour market. What is missing in the work of both Goldthorpe and Wright is any recognition that there is a distinct class situation from that of 'employers' for substantial property owners.

Erikson and Goldthorpe, like Wright, do not justify this neglect of propertied class situations on the grounds that they no longer exist. They argue that if, as I have suggested, they do still exist, so few people occupy them that it is unlikely that any social survey will include them in large enough numbers to make any reliable analysis of them possible. As the Goldthorpe scheme was designed for use in survey research, therefore, they feel justified in not including large property owners as a separate economic class. As a practical expedient, any propertied individual who appears in a sample can simply be classified along with the bureaucratic managers: not because they belong to that class, but because they can be safely 'hidden' there without distorting the empirical findings. The 'elite' class of property owners, as Goldthorpe terms it, appears, then, only as a footnote to the scheme and not as one of its principal categories. It is, however, surely preferable that a general class scheme should include all relevant categories, even if a particular conceptual box is likely to be empty in most survey reports.

The class situation of employees is seen as having to be differentiated according to the bureaucratization of employing organizations. Following Dahrendorf ([1957] 1959), they see this as leading to the differentiation of the bureaucrats who hold authority at work from the non-bureaucrats who are subject to this authority. They distinguish, therefore, two principal employee class situations: those of service-contract employees and labour-contract employees.

Service-contract employees have long-term, relatively secure conditions of employment and are generally employed on progressive, incremental salary scales with employment-based pension rights. Such employees exercise delegated authority as agents of their employing organization or utilize a specialist knowledge-based expertise in their work.[7] In order to exercise this authority or expertise, service-contract employees must have a degree of autonomy in their work, and a moral commitment to the employing organization is encouraged through institutionalized relations of 'trust' (Erikson & Goldthorpe 1993:42). Wright has also recognized this same trend and notes that 'Goldthorpe's conceptualization of class structure taps many of the same relational properties of managerial and expert positions as the conceptualization advocated in this book' (Wright 1997:25–6). In economic terms, service-contract employees constitute what Goldthorpe terms a 'service class' or a 'salariat'.

Labour-contract employees, in contrast, are involved in short-term and specific exchanges of money for effort. They work on piece rates or time rates for an employing organization and often work under the supervision of a bureaucratic, service-contract employee. In those sectors where corporate forms of organization are less widespread, such workers remain the employees of indivi-

dual employers who may supervise their work directly. Labour-contract employees are most conveniently referred to as 'working class'.

The simplest class scheme, then, would involve just five basic categories: a class of large property owners, small employers, a service class, the self-employed and a working class. Erikson and Goldthorpe argue, however, that further lines of class division must be made. Service-contract employees are differentiated into higher and lower levels of a service class according to the level of authority or of autonomy that they have. Labour-contract employees are differentiated into the skilled and non-skilled working class according to the level of skill that they exercise. On a more *ad hoc* basis, Erikson and Goldthorpe recognize the distinctiveness of agricultural property and employment relations, and they separate owner–occupier farmers from other small employers and farm workers from other labour-contract employees.

The final elements in the conceptual jigsaw are the 'intermediate' or mixed categories of clerical and supervisory employees. Routine clerical and administrative workers work under bureaucratized conditions of employment but have little or no authority of their own. Supervisory manual workers, who exercise a very limited amount of authority over fellow workers, do not themselves form part of a bureaucratic hierarchy or enjoy service-contract employment. These are 'intermediate' in terms of their employment relations, but whether they are 'intermediate' – in the middle – with respect to income and resources has to be treated as an empirical matter.

These distinctions are now widely accepted among class analysts and provide a list of class situations that can be used in assessing the causal significance of class situation for life chances and life experiences. The basic form of a sophisticated class scheme might include 11 economic classes: large property owners, small employers, farmers, self-employed, higher service, lower service, routine non-manual, supervisory manual, skilled manual, non-skilled manual and agricultural workers. These categories and their boundaries are neither sharp nor universal, and Goldthorpe recognizes that it is often useful to aggregate or disaggregate class situations according to the needs of particular research projects. The fact that the economic class scheme is a technical, operational device means that there is no unique answer to the question 'how many [economic] classes are there?' (Runciman 1989). There are 'As many as it proves empirically useful to distinguish for the analytical purposes in hand' (Erikson & Goldthorpe 1993:46 n.18).

Goldthorpe, for example, regularly uses a three-class variant (service, intermediate, working), but he also uses a seven-fold version. An early seven-class version of the Goldthorpe scheme was used in the original Nuffield mobility study (Goldthorpe 1987), but a revised seven-class version has been developed explicitly for use in comparative research. Rose's work for the British government class scheme (Rose & O'Reilly 1998) has tried to build this flexibility into his version of the scheme. This classification has 14 categories at its greatest extent, although it can be systematically collapsed into variants with nine, eight, five and three classes.

It is this pragmatic stance towards class boundaries that led some to suggest that economic class must be approached in an even more disaggregated way to achieve maximum flexibility. Esping-Andersen et al. (1993), for example, seek to recognize employment changes associated with 'post-industrialism'. Following Goldthorpe's treatment of agriculture, they highlight the value of distinguishing service sector employment from manufacturing sector employment. By the 1980s, Esping-Andersen shows, the proportion of the workforce in service sector employment,[8] comprising occupations in finance and distribution, health, education and welfare, varied from 26.2% in Germany to 44.0% in the USA.

Esping-Andersen also argues for a sharper distinction between managerial and professional employees within a category of service-contract employment. It is, he argues, professionals and not managers who enjoy the autonomy and trust that is most characteristic of Goldthorpe's service class. Managers are locked into structures of command with only limited autonomy in their bureaucratically organized work and so should be seen as occupying a distinct class situation from the professional experts. At lower levels of service-contract employment, there are similar differences between the semiprofessionals and technicians and their administrative counterparts.

For similar reasons, Grusky and Sørensen (1998) have suggested an even more radical disaggregation, arguing that, for most purposes a far more fine-grained economic classification is likely to prove useful. They advocate the use of narrow categories of jobs with technical simi-

larities in their work relations and in their relations to other jobs. These, they argue, are likely to be the foci of shared experiences and interests and so are the most useful ways of measuring the effects of economic class.

The most radical suggestion has been that a continuous scale of occupations is preferable to a scheme of discrete economic classes. The so-called Cambridge scale (Prandy 1991), however, is not built around measures of property and employment relations but is derived from measures of friendship choices. While these may be associated with economic class situations, as I will show in the next section, they are not a direct measure of it. Gershuny (2000), however, has stressed the possibility of using an economic resource scale, and he suggests that future research could benefit from a move in this direction.

This is clearly an unresolved issue, and categorial schemes are not necessarily incompatible with continuous scales. The issue cannot be resolved, however, simply by pointing to the predictive capacities of the various measures. The class schemes and class scales are, of course, working instruments for practical purposes, and that is one basis on which they must be assessed. However, they are more than this. They are attempts to describe actual social divisions resulting from particular structures of property and employment. A principal aim of class analysis is to identify any significant breaks in the distribution of resources that result from property and employment relations: these mark the structured capacities for action that generate characteristic life chances. The class schemes are attempts to map these divisions into distinct class situations and economic classes. Tasks for future research must be to clarify the economic class boundaries that it is sensible to identify in particular societies and to see whether there are any common patterns of division. The particular causal powers that underpin these divisions and constitute the structure of class situations must be uncovered. Finally, descriptive comparisons of the relative sizes of the economic classes in various societies must be undertaken.

## 3. The causal effects of class situations

The second of the central issues for class analysis is the causal significance of class relations. Once meaningful economic class divisions have been identified, their impact on the life chances and life experiences of individuals must be measured. If economic class divisions have little effect on wider social relations, then their identification is hardly worthwhile and the critics of class analysis are correct. Investigation of these causal effects is central to whether contemporary advanced societies can still be described as class societies.

While critics of class analysis have been all too ready to claim the irrelevance of class situation and so to pronounce the death of class, its advocates have been reticent about demonstrating the empirical power of their class schemes. Adequate empirical information to resolve this debate is, therefore, in short supply.

Research in Britain, however, has produced considerable evidence to show that class remains a major causal factor in people's lives. Reid (1998) has produced a valuable compilation of evidence, using a variety of class measures, to show the effects of class. There is a clear hierarchical character to class relations on measures of income and wealth. Although the sharpest economic divide is between those who benefit from property and capital, as rentiers or entrepreneurs, and those who depend primarily on the labour market (Scott 1997:Chapter 9), there are also significant differences among the various categories of employee. Professional employees and managers, for example, enjoy disposable incomes twice as high as semiskilled and unskilled workers, and they are four to six times as likely to own company shares from which they make unearned incomes and capital gains (Savage 2000:52). Twice as many professional and managerial employees as unskilled workers are home owners, and the discrepancy is almost as great for membership in employers' pension schemes. These differences in resources are matched by wider aspects of market situation: unemployment rates are almost five times as high for unskilled manual workers as for members of the service class, and unskilled manual workers are far more likely to experience periods of unemployment longer than 1 year (Reid 1998:84, 89, 105, 149, 111).

Service-contract employees, then, are significantly advantaged relative to skilled and non-skilled labour-contract employees. There is not, however, a straightforward linear hierarchy across all classes for all variables. Skilled manual workers, for example, enjoy a slightly higher income than routine non-manual workers, although they have higher rates of unemployment and are less likely to be home owners

or members of pension schemes. Nevertheless, the conclusion is clear: economic class remains a crucial determinant of the resources available for attaining other life chances.

There are also clear differences in health for the various classes: child and infant mortality, life expectancy, problems with sight and hearing, long-term illness and incapacity all show a strong class gradient. Twice as many unskilled workers as service-contract employees have problems with their eyesight, three times as many have hearing problems, and ten times as many have no natural teeth (Reid 1998:52, 55; Payne & Payne 2000:213). Twice as many unskilled workers as professional employees experience arthritic or heart problems or are overweight, and professional and managerial employees are, on average, 3.2 cm taller than unskilled workers (Reid 1998:54, 58; Payne & Payne 2000:217). In the most careful and sophisticated investigation of class and health, Rose and Pevalin (2000) have shown the strong effects of class on mortality that are apparent when class is measured in terms of employment relations.[9] These health problems reflect significant differences in living conditions. Seven times as many unskilled workers as professionals live in overcrowded homes, and five times as many have no central heating (Reid 1998:152, 154).

Such differences are reflected in many other areas of life. In the sphere of education, which is crucial to later adult earnings and occupational mobility, the same class gradient appears. Three-quarters of the children of unskilled workers leave the educational system with no qualifications at all, which is the case for just 3% of the children of professionals. Conversely, just 1% of those from an unskilled background enter higher education, while three-quarters of those from a professional background do so (Reid 1998:161, 179). There is a clear linear class hierarchy for the ownership of cars, telephones, computers, washing machines and dishwashers. While television ownership is more evenly spread, the semiskilled and unskilled spend 50% more time watching television than do professionals and managers. Professionals are almost 50% more likely than unskilled workers to read a newspaper, and they are likely to read *The Daily Telegraph* or *The Times* rather than *The Sun*. While 13% of professionals and managers buy five or more hardback books each year, three quarters of non-skilled workers buy no books at all (Reid 1998:220, 225; see Bourdieu [1979] 1986 for evidence on such cultural differences in France).

In addition to the effects of class on such basic life conditions, class analysts have always stressed the importance of class as a determinant of political outlook and interests. Central to the investigation of this is the class basis of electoral support for political parties. In study after study (Campbell et al. 1960; Alford 1963; Lipset [1959] 1960; Butler & Stokes 1969; Lipset & Rokkan 1967; Korpi 1983) it has been found that a spectrum of political attitudes and voting from 'left' to 'right' broadly matched the class gradient of a society. This was reinforced by the effects of the demographic formation of social classes on class habitus, discussed more fully in the following section. Where the left or right political orientation was weak, members of class-based communities voted, nevertheless, for the party that was identified with their community: the party of 'people like us'. Thus, political values and class commitments reinforced each other to produce a class differentiation in political behaviour. Political participation and partisanship could be predicted by, because they could be explained by, class membership.

These studies did, however, suggest that this class effect had weakened in the latter part of the 20th century. A general decline in political participation, as shown in active membership of political parties and other associations, is well established (Putnam 2000), and this has often been seen as reflecting a wider shift from solidarism and associationalism to individualism and instrumentalism. For some, this reflects the changing composition of the electorate, as the number of manual workers declines and the number of professional and managerial employees increases. The key issue in recent debates has been whether this trend had reached the point at which class had become an insignificant variable in explanations of voting patterns. Central to these arguments are claims that voting patterns are now based on commitments and identifications that compete with, and increasingly supplement, those of class, or that voting decisions are now themselves expressions of pragmatic individual choice (Sarlvik & Crewe 1983). Yet other writers see the growing significance of value commitments as reflecting a wider 'post-materialist' value system (Inglehart 1990, 1997). Either way, voting is no longer shaped by class membership: class politics has given way to issue or identity politics (Franklin & Mackie 1992; Franklin 1985).

A basis for assessing this is provided by Nieuwbeerta and De Graaf (1999; see also Hout et al. 1995), who present comparable data for 20 countries over the period 1956–1990. Among these countries, Britain and Scandinavia showed the highest levels of class voting, and the USA and Canada the lowest. In those countries where class voting was high at the beginning of the period, a decline was apparent, but this was significant in only six: Australia, Britain, Germany, The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden (Nieuwbeerta & De Graaf 1999:41). Related studies in a comparative project, however, show that this gives only a part of the picture.

For Britain, Goldthorpe shows a constant overall level of class voting from 1964 to 1992, although there are fluctuations from one election to another (Goldthorpe 1999:61–3). He suggests that classes I–IV 'naturally' vote Conservative, while classes V–VII naturally vote Labour. Conservative support, however, is based on relatively weak class commitments, compared with the relatively strong manual class support for Labour. Conservative support can, therefore, more easily crumble. He shows, however, that there was no long-term tendency for Conservative class voting to crumble: fluctuations occurred, but the general pattern was stable. This conclusion was reinforced in the discussion of the election of 1997 by Evans and Norris (1999), and provisional results from 2001 (Billinghurst 2001) point in the same direction.

While strong class-based parties had never been formed in the USA, there is clear evidence of a persistent class effect on voting behaviour (Hout et al. 1999). The impact of class situation on voting is a constant feature of US politics, but the precise patterns of class-party alignment have changed from time to time. Classes have shifted their support from one party to another, and parties have sought to build electoral support through appeals related to changing class identities. From the 1930s to the 1970s, manual worker votes were delivered to the Democratic Party through trades union membership. Changes in union organization and membership (partly reflecting changed class identifications) have broken this link and realigned, not dealigned, the class–party relationship. This realignment involved a growth in professional and white-collar support for the Democrats and in self-employed and skilled manual support for the Republicans. Hout and his colleagues suggest a growing 'bifurcation' in service-class voting: professionals moving towards the Democrats and managers moving towards the Republicans.

In western Germany (Muller 1999), the effects of class on voting are apparent in the persistence of manual working-class support for the SPD and of property holder and employer support for the CDU. This has been partly offset, however, by the strong tendency for Protestant and Catholic adherents of all classes to support the CDU. The declining size of the petty bourgeoisie and the working class – the core class supporters of the two main parties – has altered this pattern, while the growth of intermediate classes has introduced greater complexity into the class–party relationship. The service-class bifurcation found in the USA was also apparent in Germany, where highly educated professionals, organized around expertise, have shown a greater level of support for the left than did their more Conservative counterparts in the pre-war period. This is reflected in a growth in their support for the SPD and, in particular, for the Greens. In contrast, managers and administrators, organized around the exercise of command, remain strongly conservative and support the CDU. The emphasis placed by the Greens on autonomy and their opposition to bureaucracy has also led to increased petty bourgeois support for the party.

Norway and Sweden show slightly variant patterns, although each shows the persistence of class effects. Norway (Ringdal & Hines 1999) formerly showed a very strong form of the traditional class–party alignment, but the strength of this relationship declined after 1957. This undermined the coalition of Labour with the Agrarian party that had governed from 1936. A decline in the size of the working class encouraged the Labour Party to move towards the centre. As in Germany, the growing service class became strongly committed to the Socialist Left Party, which adopted an increasingly 'green' orientation. In Sweden (Svallfors 1999) the 'traditional' configuration remains strong, reflecting the absence of any significant ethnic, religious or regional differences and the continuing strength of a centralized trades union movement.

These studies of voting show that class situation continues to shape political choices, but that it does so in a less monolithic way than before and that it operates alongside other, non-economic factors. Weber recognized the part played by non-economic factors, alongside the economic, in determining life chances. In

particular, he recognized three distinct dimensions in the overall distribution of power within societies – class, status and command – and he saw each as having a separate effect on the production of life chances.[10] Most relevant here is his recognition of the interdependence of class and status in contemporary societies.[11] Status relations originate in the distribution of prestige or social honour within a community when people judge one another as superior or inferior in relation to their values, and so give or withhold reputation and accord a particular standing to a person's way of life.

A status situation is a causal component in life chances, and a sophisticated sociological analysis must recognize that inequalities in life chances are the effects of both class and status situations, which operate conjointly to determine life chances. They operate interdependently, but their separate effects can be very difficult to disentangle. An occupation, for example, consists of people who have specific employment relations in the labour market, but it also gives them a particular standing or level of prestige in their society (Parkin 1971). Weber's account of capitalist class situations stressed the role of status as a factor reinforcing class. The material features of class relations, he argued, become central features in consciousness and identity because the styles of life with which they are associated are the principal bases for the estimation of social honour. Class relations, therefore, are clothed in an aura of legitimacy deriving from the values that define social status. Evidence on voting behaviour suggests that the close alignment of class and status has altered. Values are now less likely to correlate directly with class position along traditional lines, and this allows a realignment of class politics. In a later section of this paper I will look at these value changes themselves.

Much research remains to be done in relation to the question of the effects of class on life chances and experiences. Class gradients must be fully demonstrated through comparative investigations to show that variations in these areas relate to variations in class structure. Such research will, of course, need to recognize and take account of factors other than class, and must seek to demonstrate how these operate alongside class and conjointly with it.

## 4. Social class formation

The third issue identified is the formation of economic classes into demographically bounded social classes. This was described by Giddens (1973:107) as a process of 'structuration',[12] a process of social closure through which the individuals who occupy specific class situations are tied into broad social aggregates that are more or less clearly bounded from other aggregates. This occurs, Giddens argues, through intergenerational and lifetime occupational mobility. Where individuals and their family members move and live only among a limited range of occupations that are similar in terms of their employment conditions and life chances, there will be a homogeneity of experience among those who live within this closed range of mobility. Goldthorpe has described this as the 'demographic' formation of social classes. Social classes exist, over and above economic class situations, to the extent that the individuals who occupy these class situations are linked, through their occupational mobility, into relatively stable demographic aggregates: 'it is the rate and pattern of mobility that will determine the extent to which classes may be recognized as collectivities of individuals or families occupying similar locations within the social division of labour over time'(Goldthorpe 1987:39).

Other forms of association among individuals are also relevant, however, to the formation of social class boundaries. Patterns of family and household formation, for example, tie individuals together through bonds of marriage, partnership and parenting, ensuring that all members of a household share in the life chances and experiences that the dominant member enjoys by virtue of his or her occupational position. Recognition of this resolves one of the issues that beset class analysis for some time in the 1980s, when there was much dispute over whether the individual or the family was to be treated as the unit of stratification. Feminist critics (Acker 1973; Delphy 1981) rightly pointed to the inadequacies of the conventional approach (Goldthorpe 1983) that simply subsumed women into their family of origin or marriage. What is now clear is that the allocation of women and men separately, as individuals, is the appropriate strategy for investigations into class situation, but that the fundamental units of social class are the family households that women and men form together.[13]

Similarly, a shared experience of class conditions is strengthened and reinforced by class-conditioned patterns of leisure-time inter-

action that build solidaristic patterns of friendship and acceptance that may be the basis of assortative mating in family formation and of wider patterns of social cohesion and support. Whenever these relations of circulation and association reinforce one another in such a way as to create regular and predictable patterns of connection among the people in a set of class situations, these people form part of a single social class.

Most research to date has focused on mobility rather than association in the demographic formation of social classes (but see Goldthorpe 1987:Chapter 6). Patterns of mobility, Goldthorpe notes, are likely to be associated with patterns of association – the 'interpersonal and wider social relations' that are the 'concomitants' of mobility (Goldthorpe 1987:64), although he offers no direct evidence on this. Members of a social class move among these social positions and interact with each other more frequently than they do with persons outside the stratum. Through restricted social mobility they reinforce their own and their children's social location, and through kinship and close intimate interactions, such as leisure-time socializing and club membership, they associate with those like themselves who make up their social stratum.

Patterns of mobility in England and Wales, Goldthorpe argues, show that the service class has a relatively low degree of social closure. This is largely because it has expanded and so needs to recruit from outside its own boundaries. Although recruited from diverse class situations, low levels of downward mobility mean that the service class has tended to solidify its demographic identity over time (Goldthorpe 1987:333). Recognizable as an *economic* class, it is, nevertheless, heterogeneous in terms of the social origins of its members and so is a relatively weakly defined *social* class. The working class, in contrast, shows relatively high levels of social closure, although Goldthorpe argues that this has been much lower than during the first half of the 20th century. The crucial factor here has been a contraction in the number of working-class jobs, which has meant that there is little need to recruit from outside its own membership. Low levels of downward mobility from the service class and from intermediate-class situations has meant that the working class has become more homogeneous in its social origins and so has a greater potential for social class solidarity and cohesion. Goldthorpe argues, finally, that there is no 'lower middle' social class. The various intermediate class situations are not demographically organized into a single social class. Instead, they are formed into a number of smaller, more discrete and relatively open social classes. Many occupations in the intermediate range, furthermore, are not the final destinations of working lives but are merely passed through on the way to other locations.

Erikson and Goldthorpe's comparative study of occupational mobility remains unsurpassed as an investigation into the overall openness of class situations and trends of change over time. Their conclusion, that most advanced western societies conform closely to a 'core model' of mobility that shows only trendless variation over time, is now widely accepted. The study, however, also throws some light on this question of social class formation and helps to put Goldthorpe's earlier results in context. Around three-fifths of those born into the service classes in England, Scotland, France and Germany were members of the same class when they had established their own careers. The level is only slightly lower in Sweden and Ireland. No other class approaches this level of stability: although service classes recruited from below and were diverse in their composition, those who entered a service-class position tended to remain in one (Erikson & Goldthorpe 1993:219).

Around two-fifths of those born into skilled manual work in England, Scotland, France and Sweden were members of the same class when they had entered employment and begun their working lives. In Germany, however, the figure rises to almost a half, reflecting the continuing importance of the industrial apprenticeship in Germany. The level is also somewhat higher in Ireland. About one-third of those born into unskilled work, in all of the countries studied, were themselves to be found in unskilled work. There is considerable evidence, then, for the kind of social closure that solidifies labour-contract employees into a working class.

The formation of petty bourgeois classes showed somewhat greater variations. In England, Scotland and Sweden, around one-fifth of those born into the class were likely to remain within it, but this increased to almost one-third in Ireland and France and just under a half in Germany. This class was generally quite diverse in its composition. The corresponding figures for farmers, however, were less than one in five in Sweden, one in four in England and Germany, around two-fifths in Scotland and France, and a

half in Ireland. The farming and agricultural working classes in all countries showed the greatest homogeneity in their composition.

The evidence on social-class formation, therefore, is sparse and rather limited. While the distinction between class situation (economic class) and social class was central to Weber's argument and was built into the Goldthorpe research programme, much research has glossed the distinction or has focused on economic class alone. One of the key areas for future research must be to rectify this and to chart the changing patterns of social class formation that have occurred with the transformation of work and employment relations and the break-up of traditional class-based communities.

## 5. Class awareness, identity and imagery

The fourth question that I identified for class analysis concerns the extent to which class situations are associated with forms of class awareness that involve specific class identities and images of societies as divided into classes. In a 'class society', one where economic and social classes are fundamental to the pattern of social stratification, the members of each class tend to have a shared awareness of the common class-related conditions under which they live. This awareness may not be expressed in the language of 'class', but it will involve a conception of the differences and inequalities that divide one class from another and of the positions that they hold relative to each other. This class awareness may involve loose and inchoate social imagery, and it may, of course, coexist with other forms of social awareness and identity.

Central to arguments over the alleged death of class has been the claim that the development of postindustrial and 'postmodern' forms of social life has led to a long-term erosion in the marks of inferiority and superiority and the forms of consciousness that had formerly made class relations visible and distinct. At the same time as class relations themselves are supposed to have weakened, so their visibility and ideological salience has diminished. This 'fragmentation of stratification' has broken the link between the attenuated class relations that now exist and other aspects of social structure. Class relations may not have disappeared completely, but they have become less corporate, less collective and less communal in character. Social imagery, these critics of class analysis argue, is now organized around diverse, differentiated and overlapping lifestyles, not around a polarization of opposed forms of class consciousness.

Claims about the declining ideological salience of class are on stronger grounds than the corresponding claims about class relations themselves, but class identities and class imagery remain important. Surveys have found in excess of 90% of people in Britain still willing to recognize the existence of classes and to allocate themselves to one of them. Almost a half of the population identify as 'working class', while a quarter identify as 'middle class'. These proportions are barely changed from the 1950s, when the Glass (1954) study found a half of respondents to be working-class identifiers. Somewhat surprisingly, the proportion of people in the USA who recognize the existence of classes and have been willing to identify themselves as members of a class is also more than 90%. Just over one-third identify as 'working class', while just over a half identify themselves as 'middle class' or 'upper middle class' (Jackman & Jackman 1983, cited in Devine 1996:80).

There was also a recognition that such class differences involved differential life chances and conflicts of interest: those who identify themselves as 'poor' or 'working class' were especially likely to report their deprivations as resulting from antagonistic class interests. Marshall and his colleagues report that people in Britain most commonly see classes as occupational groups that are closely associated with income and education levels. There is, then, a recognition that work-based conditions are the determinants of differences and inequalities and that people are still willing and able to designate these as 'class' differences (Marshall et al. 1988). More broadly, Wright's comparative study (1985) found that economic class differences were associated with sharp differences in attitudes towards profits, management, distribution and corporate power. This class polarization existed in Sweden as well as the USA, although the degree of polarization was much greater in Sweden.

Despite these findings, Kingston (2000:90 ff.) has correctly argued that there is now a much weaker linkage between economic class situation and subjective class identification. The strength of the relationship that is found in any particular survey depends on exactly how the questions are asked. Thus, the vast majority of US respondents to surveys identify themselves

as 'middle class' if asked in an open question to name their class, but many manual workers will identify themselves as 'working class' if given a fixed choice between two class labels. People are, however, less likely to offer such descriptions spontaneously: they recognize them if asked about them, and they retain the ability to use them to analyse their social world, but they are more likely to resort to narrow occupational designations and to other means of self-identification if left to their own devices. People tend not to use the specific language of 'class' to define their social position, and class position no longer generates a deep sense of identity and belonging (Savage 2000:37, 111–116).

Critics of class analysis see this weakening of class imagery as associated with the rise of new sources of social difference that generate new identities and cultural alignments. It is better seen, however, as reflecting what Beck (1986) refers to as a growing 'individualisation' of class structure. Class inequalities are no longer linked to an all-pervasive sense of shared class fate. Under the conditions of a radicalized or reflexive modernity, social identities relate much more to lifestyle differences in consumption, to differences in gender, sexuality and ethnicity, and to attempts to understand and control the risks and hazards generated by contemporary modernization. While Beck tends to overstate the declining impact of class conditions on life chances, he is undoubtedly correct to highlight these new bases of social identity.

Class persists as a source of identity, but it does so alongside new sources of social awareness and identity. While gender, for example, is still structured by class, it is no longer so closely embedded in class differences and is a more salient source of identity. The changing position of women in relation to paid work has combined with the collapse of major areas of male employment to generate huge implications for work organization and household relations, 'exploding the traditional class–gender nexus' (Esping-Andersen 1993). The autonomization and disentanglement of gender identities from their long-standing subordination to patriarchal and class-based identities has begun a significant renegotiation of traditional, class-bound masculinities and femininities. Similarly, consumption differences are constrained by class situations, but social identities tend to reflect the different patterns of spending made possible by the distribution of resources rather more than the class differences themselves. New sources of identity, then, supplement class rather than replacing it completely.

This can be seen as a restructuring of class relations and a realignment of the relationships between class and status. Class divisions have tended to be reinforced and made visible through traditional status-based styles of life. Traditional ideas are more difficult to sustain as established values are continually eroded. A key feature of reflexive modernity is that all cultural foundations for social life are now open to challenge. The social solidarities of class can no longer be rooted in sharply segregated and traditionally sanctioned ways of life. The members of each class no longer feel themselves to be following a common style of life inherited from the past. All that once appeared solid in the form of class-based neighbourhoods and institutions melts into air, and class conditions come to be experienced through more precarious and transient imageries. Identities are constituted without a class-based 'template' – indeed, without any customary cultural template. In place of the stable and sharply defined status groupings of the past, there is a more shifting and unstable kaleidoscope of status differences, and it is this fluidity that creates the space within which some – those with material resources – have a greater freedom to choose their lifestyles.

It is symptomatic of this social change that the term 'lifestyle' has virtually replaced the term 'style of life' in academic discourse. This particular distinction was not made by Weber, but the common English translation of his term *Lebensstil* as 'style of life' properly grasps the way in which he saw it as reflecting the totality of a group's existence: its whole way of life. A person's status, Weber argued, typically follows from their 'style of life'. The ways that people carry out the tasks that are associated with their occupations and their sex–gender roles, and the customs and practices that they follow as members of ethnic and other social groups define particular and distinct styles of life for them. Style of life is a feature of specific and distinct life worlds and social subcultures. As Weber showed, these styles of life are rooted in specific class relations that condition a way of life and, therefore, form the bases of status judgements.

By contrast, the term 'lifestyle' has been popularized in discussions of contemporary consumerism and is simply 'a way of using certain goods, places, and times that is characteristic of a group but is not a totality of their

social experience' (Chaney 1996:5). Tastes and preferences are no longer so strongly governed by fixed social standards. They are 'lifestyle choices' for which people have an individual responsibility and for which they are judged by others. Lifestyles are inherently pluralistic, and people make a series of lifestyle choices that need not be integrated into any single, overarching style of life. In these shifting sands of social awareness, the homogenizing conditions of class become less salient as sources of social identity and consciousness.

These cultural changes, then, constitute not the end of class, but a restructuring of status and a consequent realignment in the relationships between class and status. It is this realignment that the critics of class analysis have wrongly hailed as the 'death of class'. While it is important to be more sensitive to the dissolution of the close link that formerly existed between class and status and the corresponding pluralization of status divisions, we must not ignore the continuing salience of economic class divisions (Eder 1993:12). Future research must focus on the interdependence of class and non-class factors in social identity, tracing out the ways in which persisting class conditions shape consciousness and outlook in these new circumstances.

## 6. Conclusion

Class divisions persist as a crucial structural feature of contemporary societies, shaping people's life chances and political actions. They do so, however, alongside other lines of social division and class analysis can no longer – if it ever could – claim exclusive powers of explanation. However, class cannot simply be ignored or its causal consequences denied. Any understanding of contemporary social identities and the political actions that follow from them must recognize the interplay between class and other lines of social division. The crucial future tasks in the study of social stratification follow from this agenda.

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## Notes

[1] These questions are elaborated in more detail in Scott (2001a).

[2] Goldthorpe himself eschews the label 'Weberian' because of its larger theoretical implications. My point here concerns simply the core conception of 'class' to which he subscribes.

[3] In Scott (1996) I have argued that work situation is the characteristic form taken by what I call 'command situation' within the economic sphere of class societies. This term is discussed later in the paper.

[4] Despite its importance as one of the basic class situations, Goldthorpe does not really discuss the self-employed but relies on their presumed self-evident characteristics.

[5] Marx, of course, had recognized just two basic class situations in contemporary societies – capitalists and proletarians – but later Marxists modified this to recognize a whole array of 'intermediate' class situations.

[6] It is striking that Wright also downplays the significance of these propertied class situations, despite his attempt to conceptualize them (see Wright 1997:48). As Wright notes, 'When I refer to the "capitalist class" in the empirical analyses, I am, by and large, referring to relatively small employers, not the wealthy owners of investment portfolios. There is certainly no analysis of anything approaching the "ruling class"' (Wright 1997).

[7] I have analysed these two aspects of power relations elsewhere under the rubrics 'command' and 'expertise' (Scott 2001b:Chapters 2 and 5). Goldthorpe sees agency theory in economics as important in the analysis of delegated authority.

[8] This is not the same thing as Goldthorpe's category of service-contract employment.

[9] They draw on Fitzpatrick and Dollamore (1999) and related work undertaken to test the validity of the UK official classification.

[10] Weber's most explicit discussions of stratification concentrated on class and status and on their relationship to 'party', which has led to the common misunderstanding that his three dimensions were class, status and party. In fact, his third dimension was not mentioned in his essay and has to be uncovered from his largely separate discussions of 'authority' and bureaucracy. Party and command, or authority, are, for Weber, completely distinct phenomena. This is discussed at length in Scott (1996).

[11] Command situations are most relevant in so far as they operate in and through class as an aspect of the 'work situation'. Wright has illuminatingly explored the importance of command ('authority' or 'domination') and its role in reinforcing and expanding class divisions, although he eschews some of the Weberian implications of this idea. Only in the countries of the former Soviet bloc was political command a major influence on life chances.

[12] Giddens' later work gave the term a more specific meaning in his sociology.

[13] This is not to deny, of course, that life chances and life experiences will be shaped by such household effects as well as by the independent effects of personal class situation.

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