

## **Where did Class go, Why may it be returning?: A view from Sociology students**

**Joyce E Canaan**

*Birmingham City University, Birmingham, England*

### **Abstract**

*This paper explores students' seemingly puzzling engagement with what I call 'processes of classification'. Whilst most students on the Social Identities module I taught between 2005-2006 and 2008-2009 claimed that 'class didn't matter' to them, during 2009-2010 more students engaged with classificatory processes. Using the poststructuralist sociological and Marxist literatures, I suggest that as the former argues, student dis-identification with such processes occurred during the first four years I taught the module. Students' greater engagement with classificatory processes during 2009—2010 may indicate some ways that the deepening economic and political climate of polarisation separating the wealthy elite from all others was impacting student engagement with this aspect of their identities. I conclude by suggesting that in such a climate, Marxist and other progressive academics should seek to realise Mills' sociological imagination more fully.*

**Keywords:** class, classification, poststructuralist sociology, Marxism, growing class polarisation

## Introduction

This paper contributes to my efforts to understand a puzzle I have been thinking about for the past five years. The puzzle has two components, one of which colleagues and I recently began to address (Jenkins et al, 2011). In that paper I observed that many of the Sociology students to whom I taught a year long Social Identities module for the past five years of its existence (2005-2006 to 2009-2010), seem to have accepted the challenge that the module offered them to rethink their gendered/sexualised and racialised identities as socially produced and as much more unstable than they had previously thought. However, most of these students—from minority ethnic and white working class backgrounds—asserted that ‘class<sup>1</sup> didn’t matter’ (a phrase that many often produced in essays) to them. This was despite the likelihood that after graduation they would be facing an increasingly competitive job market in which a growing proportion of them would be likely to obtain jobs with less pay and worse conditions and status than prior cohorts (OpinionPanel, 2009, Curtis and Barkham, 2009). Given their class origins and the class trajectories they presumed they would follow, class *would be likely to* matter after graduation even if it had not been so previously. Why then did they not consider its significance as undergraduates? Whilst the sociological literature on class suggests that students’ responses were not surprising (as I will show in section one below), this literature has only partially considered wider economic and political contexts that contribute to this disarticulation. Further, if class did not matter for students up to the end of the 2008-2009 (and here is the second component of the puzzle that this paper addresses), why did class begin to matter for a growing minority during 2009-2010?

This paper has three sections. The first section initially considers how poststructuralism provides a way to contest students' common assumption that identity is something static, produced once and for all. I then use poststructuralist sociological insights to examine why processes of classification seem so difficult to identify with. I suggest that such a consideration can be enhanced by conjoining such poststructuralist insights with Marxist considerations of the wider economic and political context, one in which a growing elite perpetrate a myth of classlessness while engaging in class war that is disenfranchising others. Section two then uses this conjoined poststructuralist/Marxist perspective to discuss data from conversations in a Social Identities session about class between students and myself, and amongst students, that informed an interview I conducted with four Social Identities student respondents. I conclude by first arguing that classification is becoming easier to cognise and therefore recognise as governments here and elsewhere are producing greater class polarisation now than previously. Concomitantly and second, I suggest that a fuller realisation of the sociological imagination might provide a basis with which sociologists as teachers could challenge students' assumptions about class inequalities that governments create (and simultaneously seek to hide).

### **1. Why has classification been such an evasive process?**

I began to explore this part of the puzzle in a joint paper (Canaan et al 2011) written with three other women academics who predominantly taught or researched working class students (as indicated by these students being the first generation to attend university and having parents holding traditional manual labour jobs or low level/status retail or service sector jobs). All of us were committed to, and utilised, a critically

reflexive pedagogy/research practice and shared the assumption that ‘classification’ processes operate relationally, as do gender, sexual and racialising processes. We all took on board the poststructuralist insight that students’ agency offered them the possibility of re-negotiating their multiple, often fragmented social positionings. Following Lawler (2008:142) part of my contribution to that paper was to show firstly that, “[t]here is an anxiousness at the heart of *all* identities. Far from being stable, coherent and unproblematic, we might see identities as always built on an edgy repudiation of a variety of ‘threats’”. I would now add that this ‘edgy repudiation of threats’ is at least partly due to identities being produced:

through, not outside, difference . . . through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not . . . The unity, the internal homogeneity which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure (Hall, 1996:4-5).

Thus a sociological understanding of identity can contest the idea of a self with ‘an integrated, originary and unified identity’ and offer the idea of the self as ‘multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, positions’ (Hall, 1996:4).

I also noted in my co-authored paper that in recent years class distinctions seem to have become ‘displaced on to individual persons (or families) who are approved or disapproved, considered as normal, or . . . as faulty and pathological’ (Ibid:126). Working class identities are being disapproved of and pathologised relative to middle class identities that are affirmed and considered ‘normal’. I would now further note, adding insights from a left perspective, that, starting with Thatcher and continuing through later Tory and New Labour governments, there has been ‘a very British class war’<sup>2</sup> in which British:

[i]nstitutions, like trade unions and council houses, were dismantled; its industries, from manufacturing to mining, were trashed; its communities were, in some cases, shattered, never to recover and its values, like solidarity and collective aspiration, were swept away in favour of rugged individualism (Jones, 2011:10).

While working class labour was necessary in early post-war Fordist factories and working class power and resistance grew, from the time of Thatcher up to the present, there has been a renewed attack on the working class. Indeed, class war as a concept has been an explicit goal of prominent far right figures that explicitly targeted working class ‘values, institutions and traditional industries’ (Jones, 2011, 48). This attack was pincer-like; on the one hand, it sought to change trade union legislation so that striking became more difficult and employers were granted greater power. The Thatcher assault on steelworkers, journalists and then miners (the then most powerful trade union), effectively eroded working class rights and sense of collective power, consequently weakening British manufacturing more substantially and rapidly than elsewhere in the rest of Western Europe at that time (Jones, 2011:53). On the other hand, the Thatcher government eased the economic burden that, from the early post-war era, had fallen on the wealthiest. Tax cuts on earned income of the wealthiest fell, under Thatcher, from 83% to 40% (Jones, 2011:62). Indirect taxes, such as higher VAT on products bought by people across the class divide, impacted the poorest most as such taxes took up (and continue to take up) a larger proportion of their total income. According to Murphy (in Jones, 2011:64) Thatcher’s philosophy was that ‘those who were at the top of the pile generated the wealth’ and that room remained for those with the talent, ‘grit and determination’ to reach such heights. In such an imagined meritocracy, poverty was construed as the fault of individuals lacking the capacity to raise themselves up and to know ‘how

to budget, . . . how to spend their earnings’ properly—that is, due to ‘personality defect’ (Thatcher in Jones, 2011:64). Clearly, then, the Thatcher government initiated what has since been a growing market-based ‘*programme of the methodical destruction of collectives*’ (Bourdieu, 1998, italics in original), coupled with the demonising of those deemed deficient in this ‘moral Darwinism’ whose ‘cult’ of the [individual] winner [and loser] institutes the struggle of all against all’ (Bourdieu, 1998). Thatcher was not alone in initiating such processes; governments globally, increasingly impelled by corporate power, introduced similar strategies (Hedges, 2010). The effect has been that a small and increasingly wealthy elite in the UK and elsewhere are accruing greater wealth at the expense of all others (Hinds 2009). This is occurring in a climate where people, including social scientists, are discouraged from seeing class as a collective identity and encouraged to regard it as a singularly individualised pathology/virtue (Harvey, 2010:232).

Is this now not an important moment for social scientists as researchers and teachers to re-connect with the sociological imagination as Mills portrayed it? As Mills noted when *The Sociological Imagination* was first published in 1959, ‘If there are *any* ways out of the crises of our period by means of intellect, is it not up to the social scientists [as researchers and teachers] to state them?’ (1970:213-214). I will return to this point towards the end of section two below; for now I would suggest that the kind of critical political and economic contextualising that I am proposing fits well with Mills’ urging of social scientists to locate their work within such contexts.

Given this growing demonization of those who do not succeed in a climate of moral Darwinism, it is hardly surprising that my predominantly working class students did not seek a deep engagement

with and investment in classifying aspects of their identities—until recently. These students are not alone in finding classification a difficult process to engage with; something somewhat similar—and dissimilar—occurred in the sociological literature. From the 1950s to the early 1970s sociological analyses sought to understand working class consciousness in the context of ‘work, industrial relations and community relations’ (Savage, 2005:930). These studies explored, that is, how people manifested their class identities largely in work and other public sites. However, there were fewer studies of class from the early 1970s through the 1980s. Some attributed this silence to prior studies having ‘reached a theoretical dead end’ (Savage, 2005:798) given their ‘overly monolithic historical model of class’ with its primary focus on workplaces and other public sites. Others acknowledged their own failure as researchers to consider that class operated alongside ‘other axes of identity and inequality’ rather than singularly in and around the workplace (Lawler, 2005:798, Woodin, 2005). As Weis observed (2008), this work mirrored its predecessor; studies of class alone were replaced by studies of other identities to the exclusion of class.

Other researchers (Beck, and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Giddens (1991) suggested that sociological silence about class indicated its demise in an individualised, post-industrialised, scientifically and technologically advanced world. These researchers argued that the greatest threats came from new, potentially global, risks caused by modern science and technology, which would affect all regardless of class. Debates arose on whether class was dead, a ‘zombie’ category lurking around uselessly after its demise (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, Pakulski and Waters, 1996) or ghostlike, ‘there but not there, mentioned but not really welcomed’<sup>3</sup> (Zandy, in Lawler 2008:126). Underling these debates was a

presumed ‘decoupling of self from the weight of group, community and tradition’ as (Hey, 2005: 856) critically noted. There was little reflection, amongst these researchers, about ways that their perception of class as a vanishing act could have been ideologically shaped by the wider and prevailing government, corporate and media contexts in which they occurred.

Class re-entered sociological debate from the 1990s, with some researchers focusing on its manifestations in socially produced processes that operated internally and/or externally to the self. Skeggs’ (1997) ethnographic analysis of working class young women’s formations of their class and gender based identities, for example, explored how class operated as a structure of feeling, a ‘site of pleasure and fear’ with which these young women shaped their selves, dis-identifying with their working class origins in ways that, nonetheless, indicated that class remained ‘the omnipresent underpinning which informed and circumscribed their ability to be’ (Skeggs, 1997:104, 74). Skeggs’ understanding that ‘class is structural’ built on Bourdieu’s (1984) expanded understanding of capital beyond the economic to the social, cultural and symbolic. According to Bourdieu, those with the greatest economic capital were likely (i) to have the most powerful social networks; (ii) to wield the greatest cultural and aesthetic knowledge and power; and (iii) to be considered the most valued of all classes given the larger amount of the multiple forms of capital they held. These forms of capital together were conceptualised as producing ideas of privilege with which “class-based judgements of ‘normality’ and ‘rightness’” were produced that excluded and expelled dimensions of ‘working-classness’ (Lawler, 2008:126, 125, Skeggs, 1997).



Savage (2005) and Savage et al (2001) also acknowledged the importance of Skeggs' insight that class operated ambivalently for their analysis of how their working and middle class research participants engaged with class. They pointed to the ways that, on the one hand, class acted as kind of external benchmark' with which these individuals, negotiated their lives (Savage et al, 2001:888), yet, on the other hand, participants seemed reluctant to 'self-identify in class terms' (Payne and Grew, 2005:894). Payne and Grew (2005:902) critiqued Savage et al (2001) methodologically, claiming that the latter failed to reflexively examine their own usage of class concepts in interviews, which could have impacted respondents' hesitation in answering questions posed. Their analysis of data from Savage, et al and from their own study suggested, in contrast, that class operated as a complex, 'multi-faceted concept' (Payne and Grew, 2005:903) that needed careful unpacking, discursively and reflexively, by researchers before reaching conclusions about how respondents utilised this concept.

Whilst it is undoubtedly significant for researchers to reflect more fully on interview dynamics, as Payne and Grew (2005) suggest, markedly absent from their account and that of most other sociological researchers has been a consideration of the ways that wider political and economic contexts could have shaped their own and their respondents' perspectives. This would suggest that introducing these wider contexts into analyses could enhance an appreciation of why classification has been a particularly challenging process for working class respondents to engage with - including, as I now show, the students I taught.

## **2. Students' dis- and re-engagement with classifying processes**

My focus in this data analysis section is part of my contribution to such an understanding of classifying processes. Here I consider how the largely working class students I taught, and the four of these students from the module who I later interviewed, engaged with such processes. The analysis rests on data collected from interviews conducted with four Social Identities students in 2009-2010 about module discussions with regard to processes of classification. Interviews were conducted in May and June of 2010, after respondents had submitted, and I had marked, their final pieces of work. That way, my marking of their work could not be influenced by their observations in interviews - though undoubtedly their responses and mine were shaped by our prior interactions in class and by my marking of the work that they submitted.

These respondents were all foreign-born males; three from self-acknowledged working class backgrounds, with the fourth from a middle class Angolan background, who had spent much of his childhood in Portugal, where he claimed that he experienced being stigmatised as the colonised other. He and the others identified themselves as being other due to their class<sup>4</sup>, nation and/or sexuality and due to their experience of being othered by university peers. As one of them, of French Algerian background, noted in one interview, 'We're not considered peers with others, because we're foreigners'<sup>5</sup>. I chose to interview these students because of their outsider stance and their keenness to engage with and reflect on the module with each other and with me during the year. Most of the other students on the module<sup>6</sup> were first generation minority ethnic and white students with high aspirations for their working lives after graduation.

In another interview with these respondents I mentioned an incident that occurred in one Social Identities workshop on social class<sup>7</sup>. In this discussion, as I reported to respondents, students claimed, as in the four previous years, that ‘class didn’t matter’ to them. I was prepared for such a remark as I had heard it in the previous years of teaching this module and was determined that this time I would try to challenge this claim more effectively than before. I consequently asked students what they wanted to do after graduation. One student reported that they wanted to get a middle class job. I then noted that ‘If you’re saying that you want a middle class job [after graduation], then class must matter to you’. The student concurred, thereby affirming Ball et al’s (2002:69) point that working class students at least partly viewed a degree as offering them the possibility to be ‘different people in different places [in future]’. Another student, female, then observed that she:

recently went to a shop and bought a mack which she ended up hating but . . . she bought it . . . [because] she didn’t want people to think that she was intimidated in that shop.

This comment was followed by a further student contribution to the discussion:

Actually, I work in one of those kinds of shops and when we see students like you, we’re told to not pay them much attention because we know that we’re not going to make much of a sale from you.

At that point in the classroom conversation, more students began to participate—this seemed to me at the time to be significant as a conversation about class relations was now being articulated for the first time. This was not just of significance to me; some students who had been present or participated in this discussion later wrote in their essays that this classroom interchange had significantly contributed to their recognition of their own and others’ locations in classifying processes.

Using insights from the analysis in part one, I note firstly that neither the students nor I myself mentioned students' current class locations - it was only acknowledged as a potential future *middle* class location in the world of work. This could suggest that these students were articulating the kind of dis-identification and concomitant silence about themselves as currently working class as Skeggs (1997) indicates and the kind of understanding of middle-classness as an external (and speakable) benchmark that Savage et al (2001) mention. Like Payne and Grew (2005), however, I would also want to urge caution before accepting this point. It would be necessary to have a transcript of class discussion, exploring how I discursively introduced the topic and students responded.

I would note, secondly, that the first student speaks of entering a shop she would not normally enter. This student's comments imply that her aim had been to not feel intimidated in this situation, to not feel as she might otherwise have felt: that she was not in the 'right' - that is, working class - locale for shopping. This student's intervention had a particular resonance for me. I remembered having a similar feeling, as a middle class PhD student (roughly 30 years earlier) living on limited finances, when entering an expensive shop in which I was determined that no shop worker would intimidate me - which for me meant that I sought to feel comfortable in this shop, whether I bought something or not. It fulfilled my aim; I left the shop without buying anything and with my sense of dignity intact. I suspect that the difference between the student and myself points at least partly to our different class locations. Both my student and I sought to embody class; we each were implicitly acknowledging Skeggs' point, building on Bourdieu, that 'the body is the most indisputable materialization of class tastes . . . [and that the body's surface] 'is the site on which distinction can be drawn' (Skeggs 1997:82,

84) Each of us sought ‘to pass’ (Skeggs 1997:84) as being from a different class or class fraction than that of our origin - aspiring working and middle middle class respectively. The consequences, however, were more positive for me than for my student; I had not spent any money and left convinced that I could enter such a shop in future with more confidence. My student, however, had spent money on a coat that she later disliked but kept; her success in this act had a certain hollowness to it.

Whilst this discussion may have enabled some students, as they reported in their essays, to consider classificatory processes more significant than they might have otherwise, I wonder what impact the second student’s comment had on the first one. The former had had the courage to express in class an incident that was literally if not figuratively costly. Whilst she may have felt at least a partial sense of victory in going into that shop and buying something even if she later did not like it, this second student’s comment indicates that at the time of this discussion (if not when I was a PhD student), shop workers were taught to ignore ‘students like you’ who might not buy something in ‘those kinds of shops’. Passing may have been sought, but I am left wondering, retrospectively, if this class discussion had further, negative ramifications for the first student.

In then relating this incident to respondents, I reported that students in their cohort, as in earlier years, claimed in the module session that class did not matter to them. I asked respondents why they thought that at least some of their peers actively dissociated themselves from identifying as working class. First, an out gay Spanish student in his mid-30s who came from a very poor background (which he referred to as ‘the gutter’), who I call Federico<sup>8</sup>, who claimed to have previously experienced class hatred and homophobia noted that *students do not want to be ‘othered’*. He

reported that he had been ‘othered’ since childhood due to his class location and sexual orientation, and, although he had long wanted peers to see him as ‘normal’, he had come to accept that this would never happen. He assumed that other students on the module, largely from working class backgrounds perhaps less forcibly negated/imposed by others than his had been, felt a kind of class anxiety (Lawler2008) that took the form of an unwillingness:

to accept this location. [For s]ome people, it’s the stigma of recognising themselves as oppressed. They don’t want to be the other. So they created a narrative . . . as ‘not oppressed’.

Is this perceived unwillingness not dissimilar to the poststructuralist sociological point that those from working class backgrounds dis-identify with their current class location and only mention class with regard to that towards which they aspire?<sup>9</sup> Could other students’ responses in class not also indicate that in a climate of growing demonization of the working class such a dis-identification is hardly surprising?<sup>10</sup>

Second, Paolo, an Angolan who lived in Portugal from age 10 into his 30s (when he came to the UK to do a degree), noted that the Social Identities module curriculum challenged students’ ideas about the elite by considering how the wealthy sustained their privilege at the expense of others’ current class locations and future aspirations. Paolo partly added to Federico’s point above that the narrative I offered was not one students desired: ‘When you start telling them that there is a problem with those at the top, they [feel uncomfortable because they] . . . want to be the top’. I am uncertain if these students aspired for ‘top’ or elite positions given the expressed aim of at least some of obtaining jobs as social, probation or voluntary sector workers. But perhaps I was not as clear as I could have been in differentiating students’ middle class aspirations from the

positions held by the wealthiest. Many students were the first generation in their families to go to university, and had been encouraged by government and family to believe the meritocratic myth that talent and hard work would ensure financial success - even if, perhaps, not 'top' positions. And why should they not have done so, given that perhaps especially in the current economically insecure environment, students' future economic survival is a significant concern?

Interestingly, in response to my question as to why some students had written in their essays of their growing engagement with classifying processes, Paulo made another suggestion:

I think that some of it [students' growing recognition of class] is the economic situation of this country . . . That is reality showing itself up . . . These are the sort of things that make people wake up'.

Federico then added:

Probably some of the students, their families, were affected in a way, or knowing a friend or someone that suddenly lost their job . . . and they [the family members/friends now] have problems . . . And they [the students] start to think.

Federico further noted that it was not only students, or people they knew, who were losing jobs; rather, there was a growing awareness of an economic crisis whose impact meant that after graduation these students were less likely to obtain the kind of graduate jobs they had aspired to when starting their degrees:

There's not that optimistic vision that some of them were having before starting the degree. Suddenly in the middle of the degree, the situation changed . . . For many weeks [thereafter] the media . . . were reporting "5,000 people sacked". And again and again and again and again [this kind of reporting occurred].

Federico is expanding on Paolo's point, suggesting that students were becoming more aware of classification as they heard a growing number of media reports of redundancy. '[T]he middle of the degree' may have been the banking crisis of September 2008 that occurred at the start of these students' second year, whose ramifications were discussed in the media especially over the next few months when key private companies began to close and job losses grew. Indeed, as OpinionPanel noted (March 2009), even before the September 2008 economic crash there was a trend of graduates not achieving what they deemed to be 'graduate jobs' at a time when work insecurity grew alongside insecurity about obtaining a mortgage in future. As Allen and Ainley (2011) observed, there was a 25% rise in graduate unemployment from December 2008 to December 2009 along with a total of 14% of all graduates unemployed.

These students' comments suggest, then, that in a context of growing class polarities and work insecurity, it may be possible for Marxist and, I would urge, other progressive academics, to engage students more fully with processes of classification as well as other processes than previously. Indeed, over 50 years ago Mills (1970:200) was urging social scientists:

to imagine social science as a sort of public intellectual apparatus, concerned with public issues and private troubles and with the structural trends of our time underlying them both.

This understanding of the role and potential of social science is particularly crucial in a situation where higher education is potentially facing its demise as a public institution (see, for example, Campaign for the Public University and Canaan (forthcoming) for an analysis of this process). It seems particularly relevant on a module which seeks to encourage students to develop a 'sociological imagination' in ways that



aim to connect, as Mills put it, ‘an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves . . . with larger social realities’ (1970:22). The present is, then, a moment when the sociological imagination is needed, linking the ‘limited orbits’ of personal biography with wider social and historical processes, so as to enable ‘a transvaluation of values’ (Mills 1959:14) that de-familiarises the familiar.

## **Conclusion**

Social scientists in general, and sociologists in particular, often claim that their intellectual projects seek to link the personal with wider contexts. The analysis above suggests that at the present moment of crisis when the self-professed Thatcherite ‘dries’ (The phrase finder 2011) followed by Tory, Liberal Democrat and Labour governments repetition of the mantra that ‘there is no alternative’ to free market capitalism, it is of utmost importance that strategies for exploding this mantra are developed. At a time when the UK government is imposing austerity measures that will more fully privatise the already partly privatised welfare state and enrich the already exceedingly wealthy (Quinn et al 2011) a sociological imagination that connects the personal and political is necessary. As this analysis has suggested, it is by linking poststructuralist and Marxist perspectives that such a connection can be realised.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> I use the word ‘class’ when referring to non-poststructuralist and ‘classifying’ or ‘classification’ to refer to poststructuralist understandings.

<sup>2</sup> See also Monbiot (2011).

<sup>3</sup> Poststructuralists might observe that the existence of such zombies indicated the continued survival of the process of classification as it haunted seemingly stable binary of employers and labourers. Marxists could add that the production of such seeming zombies speaks to the power of employers to dis-enfranchise a growing proportion of labourers.

<sup>4</sup> It remains unclear to me why these students had little problem with engaging with processes of classification. Was this due to ideas of classification operating in their home countries, to their deep engagement with ideas the module encouraged them to consider, to their othering in additional ways by peers? Further research would be necessary to answer this question.

<sup>5</sup> All quotations come from transcribed interviews.

<sup>6</sup> They were not the only students of European or African origin; there was a slightly greater number of other students who shared such origins.

<sup>7</sup> Classes were held in ‘the bean bag room’ (a room with no desks or chairs that sought to encourage dialogue rather than lecture-based monologue).

<sup>8</sup> All names are pseudonyms, although respondents were happy for their own names to be used in any of my publications, which is why I mention their countries of origin.

<sup>9</sup> It may of course be the case that Federico had taken on board module readings that explored such a process of dis-identification.

<sup>10</sup> Whether or not this climate is one perceived as ‘oppressive’ requires closer study.

## References

Allen, M. & Ainley, P. (2011) Why young people can’t get the jobs they want (and what can be done about it), [www.radicaled.wordpress.com](http://www.radicaled.wordpress.com), accessed 20/4/11.

Ball, S, et al (2002) ‘Classification’ and ‘Judgement’: Social class and the ‘cognitive structures’ of choice of Higher Education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23(1):51-72.

Beck, U (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a new modernity*, M Ritter, translation, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.

Beck, U and Beck-Gernsheim E (2001) *Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.

Boltanski, L and Chiapello, E (2005) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London and New York, NY: Verso.

Bourdieu, P. (1998) Utopia of endless exploitation: the essence of neoliberalism, *LeMonde diplomatique*,  
<http://mondediplo.com/1998/12/08bourdieu> , accessed 10/08/09.

Bourdieu, P (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Butler, J (2004) *Undoing Gender*, New York and London: Routledge.

Campaign for the Public University <http://publicuniversity.org.uk/>

Canaan, J (forthcoming) Resisting the neoliberalising university: What critical pedagogy can offer, *Journal of Critical Education Policy Studies*.

Cohen, R (2011) From Oklahoma to Tobruk, *New York Times*,  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/25/opinion/25iht-edcohen25.html>,  
accessed 11/3/11.

Curtis. P. and Barkham, P ( 2009) Generation crunch: young face crisis in hunt for jobs, *Education, The Guardian*, 10 January 2009,  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/jan/10/graduate-employment-crisis-rescue-package?INTCMP=SRCH>, accessed 15/01.2009.

Foucault, M (1996) *The Politics of Truth*, Lotringer, S and Hochroth, L, eds, New York and Brooklyn: Semiotext(e).

Giddens, A (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and society in the late modern age*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press. Hall, S (1996) Introduction: who needs identity?, in Hall, S and Du Gay, P, eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity*, pp. 1-17, London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage.

Harvey, D (2010) *The Enigma of Capital: And the crises of capitalism*, London: Profile Books.

Harvey, D (2008) David Harvey on class and class struggle, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhqD3az9cZ4>, accessed 1/11/10.

Hedges, C (2010) *Death of the Liberal Class*, New York: Nation Books.

Hey, V (2005) The contrasting social logics of sociality and survival: cultures of classed be/longing in late modernity, in *Sociology* 39(5): 855-872.

Hinds, D.(2009) Jump! You fuckers!  
<http://jumpyoufuckers.wordpress.com/3-the-origins-of-the-crisis/>,  
accessed 2/2/11.

Jones, O (2011) *Chavs: The demonization of the working class*, London and New York: Verso.

Lawler, S (2008) *Identity: A Sociological Perspectives*, Cambridge UK and Malden MA: Polity.

Lawler, S (2005) Introduction: Class, culture and identity, in *Sociology*, 29(5):797-806.

Mills, C Wright (1970) *The Sociological Imagination*, Harmondsworth: Penguin

Monbiot, G (2011) A corporate coup d'etat,  
<http://www.monbiot.com/2011/02/07/a-corporate-coup-detat/> , accessed 12/02/11.

OpinionPanel (2009 We're your future: Important message from recent graduates to employers.

Pakulski, J and Waters, M (1996) *The Death of Class*, London: Sage.

Payne, G and Grew, C (2005) Unpacking 'class ambivalence': some conceptual and methodological issues in accessing class, *Sociology* 39(5):893-910).

Quinn, J, Wilson, H and Ahmed, K (2011) *The Telegraph*,  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/banksandfinance/8291190/Big-banks-to-unveil-24-billion-profits.html> , accessed 11/3/11.

Reay, D et al (2005) *Degrees of Choice: Social Class, Race and Gender in Higher Education*, Stoke on Trent:Trentham.

Savage, M (2005) Working-class identities in the 1960s: revisiting the Affluent Worker Study, *Sociology* 39(5): 929-946.

Savage, M, Bagnall, G and Longhurst, B (2001) Ordinary, Ambivalent and Defensive: Class identities in the northwest of England, *Sociology* 35(4):875-892.

Skeggs, B (1997) *Becoming Respectable: Formations of Class and Gender*, London: Sage.

The Phrase Finder There is no alternative,  
<http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/376000.html> [accessed 25 2 11).

Weis, L (2008) Introduction, in Weis, L. ed. *The way class works: readings on school, family and the economy*. New York and London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, pp. 3-9.

Woodin, T (2005) Muddying the waters: changes in class and identity in a working-class cultural organization, *Sociology* 39(5): 1001-1018.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks to the two reviewers for their helpful comments. Also, special thanks to Spyros Themelis for encouraging this engagement with social class.

## **Author details**

Joyce Canaan is Professor of Sociology at Birmingham City University. She has published widely on critical pedagogy, the neoliberal university and learning and teaching in the university today. Her email address is [Joyce.Canaan@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:Joyce.Canaan@bcu.ac.uk)