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The Class Pictures in Citizens' Minds

Social class has long played a crucial role in explaining social behavior (Alford 1963; Anderson and Davidson 1943; Durkheim 1933; Lamont 1992; Lipset 1960; Wright 1997). However, the continuing importance of class for understanding behavior in Western nations has been questioned (Beck and Beck-Gernesheim 2002; Clark, Lipset, and Rempel 1993; Clark and Lipset 1991; Franklin 1992; Giddens 1994; Hechter 2004; Inglehart 1997; Kingston 2000; Listhaug 1997; Pakulski and Waters 1996). While recent efforts have been made to revitalize the importance of social class (e.g. Brooks, Nieuwebeerta, and Manza 2006; Elff 2007; Evans and Tilley 2017; Sosnaud, Brady, and Frenk 2013), the importance of class for understanding social behavior in the Western industrialized nations remains in question (Best 2011).

Why might the relevance of social class be declining? An important argument on this front contends that several socio-economic changes have diminished the distinctiveness and meaningfulness of social classes as a psychological construct (see Evans 2000 for a discussion). Class distinctions might be a victim of the growing economic affluence of Western nations. This growing affluence means that the young are socialized in conditions of material security, which prompts a shift in value priorities and a focus on new concerns at the expense of old class-based conflicts (Inglehart 1997). In addition, economic security may enable, or alternatively be driven by, increased levels of educational attainment. Some authors argue that this leads to 'cognitive mobilization' such that a highly educated citizenry is no longer reliant on group-based cues when forming preferences and instead is capable of engaging in more demanding forms of reasoning (Dalton 1996). Other authors, such as Giddens (1994), argue that increasing social mobility helps undermine class based identities as mobility means that 'class is...less of a 'lifetime experience' than it was before' (144). Under the most stringent of these arguments, such changes are argued

to have had the result that ‘the symbiosis of occupation and class [has been] shattered’ such that there is a ‘tendency to individualized lifestyles and life situations [that] forces people...to make themselves the centre of their own life plans and conduct’ rather than social classes (Beck and Beck-Gernesheim 2002, p. 31, 37). These disparate lines of argumentation suggest that individuals in the affluent West should see little differences between social classes and thus come to rely less on class position, and more on values or other social divisions such as gender, race and ethnicity (Hechter 2004), when forming preferences and taking social action.

While the argument that social classes have lost their distinctiveness is commonly made, we must note that it is typically defended with evidence that is not well suited for investigating individuals’ cognitive and affective views of social classes. Much of the critique of the continuing relevance of social class focuses on the relationship between objective indicators of class, such as occupation, and outcomes such as voting, perceptions of the origins of social inequalities, and the nature of people’s living conditions and resulting social relationships (e.g. Beck and Beck-Gernesheim 2002 ch. 3; Clark and Lipset 1991).ⁱ However, such evidence cannot tell us much about the cognitive understandings of class held by individuals. Ultimately, if we wish to understand the potential relevance of social classes for social and political behavior we require more fine-grained information about how individuals perceive social classes as it is these *subjective* properties that will proximately structure resulting behaviors and cognitions.

In this article, we take a first step in the exploration of how individuals perceive social classes in affluent societies. Theoretically, we draw on existing discussions of class consciousness which we supplement with insights from social psychological research on social identity and stereotypes to arrive at a deeper and more detailed conception of class consciousness than hitherto investigated. Specifically, we use a mail survey of Danish citizens to investigate

whether Danish citizens continue to identify with a social class and the relationship between identification and three aspects of class consciousness: (1) perceptions of what social classes are (*class associations*), (2) perceptions of the boundaries between social classes (*class boundaries*), and (3) perceptions of the differences between social classes (*class opposition*). The crucial points that emerge from our analyses are that individuals continue to identify with social classes, broadly agree on the meaning and boundedness of social classes regardless of class identification, and that class identification plays a particularly strong role in shaping perceptions of class opposition. Social class, in other words, is still present in citizens' minds. Our results are particularly notable given that Denmark is a highly affluent nation with relatively low levels of economic inequality; in other words, just the type of setting where we would expect to see *weak* class consciousness insofar as inequality renders class divisions more salient and thereby facilitates class based thinking and behavior (Andersen and Curtis 2012; Andersen and Heath 2002; Newman, Johnston, and Lown 2015).

We proceed as follows. We begin with a discussion of the concept of class consciousness from which we draw the theoretical basis for our analyses. We then discuss the indicators of class consciousness that we will empirically explore and our expectations regarding them, before segueing into a discussion of our survey, its results, and their broader implications.

The Class Pictures in Our Heads

Our focus on the subjective perceptions of individuals regarding social classes is motivated by the idea that such perceptions matter for evaluations and behaviors. To the extent that individuals possess unordered or diffuse conceptions of classes, as suggested by some scholars, then social class is unlikely to play much of a role in understanding cognition and behavior. On the other hand, to the extent that individuals do indeed discriminate across classes,

and hold distinct cognitive representations of them, then class may play an important role in affecting other outcomes of importance, at least in some contexts. But, which subjective elements should we look for?

Previous research in the field has mainly been conducted under the heading of class consciousness (for a comprehensive recent review, see Pérez-Ahumada 2014). This debate has largely revolved around two approaches to understanding class consciousness: processual and structural (cf. Pérez-Ahumada 2014; Wallace and Junisbai 2003; Wright 1997). The processual approach typically accords theoretical and analytical primacy to individuals' class identity while the structural approach is more attentive to individuals' class related interests following from their positions in the class structure. However, as Wright (1997, 497) points out, the two perspectives should be seen more as complementary than conflicting. We take a similar position and follow Pérez-Ahumada (2014) and Wallace and Junisbai (2003) in analyzing both individuals' perceptions of (class) society and their own place in it.ⁱⁱ

In accordance with this comprehensive perspective, we draw on both theoretical (Giddens 1973; Mann 1973; Rosenberg 1953) and empirical (Kelley and Evans 1995; Miller et al. 1981; Pérez-Ahumada 2014; Wallace and Junisbai 2003) works that have identified several sub-dimensions of class consciousness among which it is useful to distinguish. Following the basic differentiation between processual and structural approaches, these authors have singled out individuals' class self-identification – i.e., individuals' sense of belonging to a certain class – as a first, and often foundational, element of class consciousness. The same authors identify a sense of class conflict as a next step in the development of class consciousness, i.e., the perception that the interests of an individual's own class conflict with those of one or more other classes. Both

Giddens and Mann also theorize an additional step – at least among the disadvantaged classes – comprised of the revolutionary ideal of overthrowing the existing social order.

In relation to this prior work, our approach can be characterized as narrower but deeper. On the one hand, it is narrower in the sense that we do not investigate the normative content of individuals' class beliefs or the beliefs class members *should* hold to be considered class conscious. On the other hand, our approach is deeper in the sense that in addition to class self-identification we invest more attention than previous studies in individuals' perceptions of social classes, the rigidity of the class structure, and the political relevance of classes. We thus focus more on what, with inspiration from Wright (1997), could be termed 'class *structure*' consciousness, i.e. consciousness of the class structure and its nature. We do so because the argument that social class has a declining, and perhaps even null, influence over social behavior in affluent society (e.g. Beck and Beck-Gernesheim 2002) revolves around the idea that social classes have lost meaning and distinctiveness to citizens of such societies. To fully test this argument we need to pry deeper into the beliefs individuals hold about social classes and the class structure. The overall research question that we pursue in the following, thus, is whether we can detect the existence of coherent class consciousness in an affluent Western Society.

Dimensions of Class Consciousness

Our approach to the study of class consciousness builds on prior work from sociology (cf. above), supplemented with insights from social psychology. The first component of class consciousness we will investigate is class identification. We follow Giddens (1973) and Mann (1973) in seeing identification as the most basic level of class consciousness. Perhaps not surprisingly, class identification has long played a role in sociological analyses of class (e.g. Andersen & Curtis 2012; Kelley & Evans 1995; Evans & Kelley 2004; Hodge & Treiman 1968;

Hout 2008; Jackman 1979; Kingston 2000; Speer 2016). Self-identification reflects, first, awareness of the existence of classes and, second, a sense of affective attachment to one such class. A sense of identification is crucial to establish because of its potential behavioral consequences; identification with a group, a class in this case, is typically associated with more positive beliefs regarding the group and behaviors biased in favor of the group (Spears 2011; Tajfel 1978).

To more fully understand the role social classes play in people's perception of society we will also explore the specific beliefs individuals attach to social classes. We focus on three dimensions of belief regarding social classes—perceptions regarding class associations, class boundaries, and class oppositions. Our main attention rests on perceptions regarding the working, middle, and upper classes because these are the classes most frequently found in political and social rhetoric. We review these dimensions next.

Our first dimension (*class associations*) concerns perceptions of what class *is*, i.e. what people associate with the concept of class. What does it mean if an individual perceives someone to be a member of the working/middle/upper class? Which images come to mind? How do individuals stereotype members of the classes? From the perspective of scholars arguing that class lacks meaning for people in modern societies we would expect individuals to have, at best, vague conceptions of class and provide disparate associations unrelated to scholarly conceptions of class. On the other hand, if the concept of class brings up an ordered set of associations connected with classical understandings of the concept—e.g. class as based on occupation or placement within the social structure—then reliance on theories based on such conceptions would seem less problematic. Thus, exploring individual's perceptions of what class means is an important part of the exploration of class consciousness.

Our exploration of class associations will focus both on perceptions of classes in respondents' own words (as in Marshall et al. 1988) as well as on a more novel set of measures concerning the stereotypes people believe characterize members of social classes. Here we will draw upon recent social psychological research on the content of stereotypes (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007; Cuddy et al. 2009; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2002). These studies show that social group stereotypes universally fall along two dimensions: (1) warmth stereotypes which 'stem from appraisals of the potential harm or benefit of the target group's goals' and (2) competence stereotypes which relate to the 'degree to which the group can effectively enact those goals' (Cuddy et al., 2007, p. 632). In other words, is the group friend (high warmth) or potential foe (low warmth) and how worried should I be about their intentions (very if they have high competence, less so if low competence). The specific placement of a group along these dimensions in turn affects the emotional responses one is likely to have toward these groups and their members (e.g. pity to high warmth/low competence groups and envy toward the inverse ranking) and concomitant behavioral responses (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007). These stereotype beliefs have not, to our knowledge, been investigated in the context of class consciousness to any major extent before, but are important to consider given that stereotypes constitute an important part of social cognition and because of their potential influence on behavior (Fiske and Taylor 2013).

The second set of beliefs we will explore concern perceptions of *class boundaries*. If our first set of beliefs focused on the content of social classes, these items relate to whether individuals believe that social classes are bounded entities set off from one another. As such, these beliefs may constitute an initial (albeit not sufficient) step toward subsequent beliefs regarding potential antagonisms between social classes in society. We will focus in particular on

perceptions regarding whether individuals perceive social class when meeting others, the difficulty of cross-class friendships, and the difficulty of class mobility.

Our third, and final, set of beliefs concern the perceived relationship between social classes; what Mann (1973: 13) refers to as ‘class *opposition*’. In our approach, we include under this heading perceptions regarding how different social classes are from one another and the individuals’ degree of agreement or disagreement with social classes on political matters, i.e. to which social class the individual’s loyalties lie and conversely which class(es) they consider as potential antagonists. Such beliefs are important to understand as perception of rigid boundaries between oppositional groups are crucial antecedent beliefs for efforts to change the social structure to advantage one’s group (Miller et al. 1981; Simon and Klandermans 2001; Tajfel and Turner 1979). However, as we reviewed earlier, various authors would suggest that such perceptions should be held by few individuals due to growing economic affluence and concomitant changes to the identity-structures of the mass public.

Investigating class identification and its relationship to these beliefs enables us to paint a more nuanced portrait of class consciousness in a modern, affluent, society than prior work especially as we are introducing new elements (e.g. perceptions of political agreement/disagreement and class stereotypes) not found in prior work. In the next section, we detail our expectations regarding the three dimensions.

Research Questions and Expectations

We pose two inter-related questions. First, do individuals in an affluent society continue to hold meaningful class images in their minds? Our basic expectation is that they will despite the warnings of the ‘death-of-class’ theorists discussed at the beginning of the manuscript. Importantly, social class continues to structure the lived experiences of individuals in Western

nations, including their educational attainment (Goldthorpe and Jackson 2008), friendships and marriages (Schwartz and Mare 2005), health (Elo 2009), and lifestyle choices (Bennett et al. 2009), and, crucially, how individuals explain these varying outcomes (Evans 1993; Kraus, Piff, and Keltner 2009). It thus seems reasonable to expect individuals to continue to meaningfully delineate between social classes and form identifications with specific ones as such.

Second, how does social class identity influence these varying perceptions? Here our expectations break down by dimension of belief. First, we expect to see consensual perceptions of class associations and boundaries across levels of class identification as these beliefs are likely to stem from similar informational sources. For instance, prior research on the nature of social stereotyping shows that group placement along the two dimensions we explore is affected by the social structure, with individuals rating groups with high (low) levels of social status as highly competent (less competent) and perceptions of inter-group conflict associated with placements along the warmth dimension (Caprariello, Cuddy, and Fiske 2009; Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2002). Moreover, while individuals may be generally motivated to adopt positive attitudes toward the in-group and positively differentiate between social groups, adopting divergent beliefs on these two dimensions need not positively advance these ends. In other words, these beliefs may not strongly impinge upon the identity-defensive motivations that would otherwise drive belief polarization from a social identity perspective. Thus, we expect to see a smaller role for social identity on these two belief dimensions.

While we expect that class identification will not strongly influence class associations we will investigate a set of expectations specific to the stereotype dimension. First, we expect that the upper and working classes will be stereotyped in an ambivalent manner, with the working class rated higher on the warmth dimension than on the competence dimension and vice versa for

the upper class (Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2002). In practice, many groups receive mixed ratings on the two stereotype dimensions, i.e. higher on one dimension than the other (Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2002). This pattern occurs partly for functional reasons with the higher scores on one dimension serving to rationalize the lower scores on the other (i.e. the working class may not have power, and hence competence, but at least members of the working class are nicer than those in the upper class). Second, we expect to see individuals rate the middle class highly on both dimensions. The middle class operates as a societal reference group in many Western nations, as can be seen in the high levels of individuals who subjectively identify with the middle class on social surveys (Evans and Kelley 2004).ⁱⁱⁱ Again, this relative placement of the groups should occur across subjective class identifications given that the stereotypes are rooted in the same social structure.

On the other hand, we believe that social class identity will play a stronger role in guiding beliefs about class *opposition*. Thus, traditional theories of class conflict leads us to expect that perceptions of class opposition may be particularly likely to occur among the working class as “those ‘below’ are, above all, struck by the gap between them and ‘the others’” and thus “tend to emphasize the cleavages that...account for the deprivations they feel” (Dahrendorf 1959, 284). Furthermore, the broad literature on the effects of social identity demonstrate that identification with a group, a class in this case, is typically associated with more positive beliefs regarding the group, and likely negative beliefs regarding relevant out-groups, as this serves goals of positive group distinctiveness (Spears 2011; Tajfel 1978). Individuals may then accentuate how much they agree with fellow class members and disagree with other classes while accentuating differences between classes for group distinctiveness purposes. Thus, we generally expect to see

self-identification with a class associated with more heightened political agreement with the class.

Survey

We investigate our research questions using a survey of Danish citizens. The Danish case is particularly interesting for our purposes given that Denmark is a highly affluent nation with relatively low levels of economic inequality. Higher levels of economic inequality help make class more salient in society and facilitate comparisons across class groupings (Andersen and Curtis 2012; Andersen and Heath 2002; Newman, Johnston, and Lown 2015). Thus, Denmark may provide something of a ‘least likely’ case for finding many individuals with a robust class consciousness. Indeed, Borre and Goul Andersen (1997, 140-2) provide evidence that fewer Danes identified with a class, and particularly the working class, between 1971 and 1994, although their study does not explore other subjective indicators of class consciousness as we do. Furthermore, recent qualitative evidence suggests that Danes (as well as other Scandinavians) hold a particularly strong preference for social equality which further strengthens their tendency towards rejecting the existence of class differences particularly when queried directly as in our study (Faber et al. 2012, 70–2, 177–9). Finally, Denmark is an interesting case to explore because there has not been a particularly great deal of attention to the nature of class consciousness within the Danish research community (but see: Borre and Goul Andersen 1997; Faber et al. 2012).

The population for our study was Danish citizens with a sampling frame of individuals above the age of 18 residing in Denmark. A random sample of 2,500 individuals was drawn from population data maintained by the Central Person Register. Each of these individuals was mailed a questionnaire on 27 April 2015 along with an explanatory letter, a small gift, and a business reply envelope for returning the completed questionnaire. Respondents who had not already

returned the questionnaire were mailed a postcard reminder on 12 May and on 1 June those who had not answered were mailed a replacement questionnaire. In total, 1,227 respondents mailed back a questionnaire for a final response rate of 51.1 per cent.^{iv} While there were some slight deviations between the sample and population data mainly resulting from too few respondents under the age of 26, there are no serious disparities and the sample is, therefore, considered representative of the population for which reason the data is not weighted in the analyses.

Respondents to our survey answered a battery of items concerning social classes in Denmark. Our key independent variable is *Class Identification*, which we measured via the following question: “Sometimes there is talk of different social groups or social classes. If you were to place yourself in such a social class which of these would it then be?”. Respondents could select one of the following answers: lower class, working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, upper class, or don’t know. This is a standard measure of social class identity used in the literature (Curtis 2016; Speer 2016). Table I provides the distribution of responses to this question.

INSERT TABLE I HERE

The survey contained measures designed to assess the three dimensions of class beliefs we are interested in and which will serve as our dependent variables. First, we measured respondent’s *class associations* through both open-ended and closed choice measures. In the open-ended measures respondents were asked to indicate “what sort of person” they think of when they hear “someone described as [upper class/middle class/working class]” (cf. Marshall et al. 1988). Second, we assessed respondent’s social class stereotypes. Following common practice in the field (designed to avoid social desirability effects dominating responses; see: Fiske, Cuddy, and Glick 2002), respondents were asked to indicate how much they perceive ‘people in

general' as characterizing the working/middle/upper classes along six traits: caring, independent, sympathetic, intelligent, accommodating, and competent. We focus on two indices formed from the average of respondents' responses to these items (i.e. one index focuses on the three warmth questions [caring, sympathetic, and accommodating] and the other on the three competence items [independent, intelligent, and competent]).^v The indices range from 1-5 with higher scores indicating more positive evaluations on the dimension. See Table I for descriptive statistics for the stereotype measures.

Our second set of dependent variables tap individual's perceptions of *class boundaries*. Respondents were asked three questions relevant to this dimension: (1) whether they tend to notice social class when encountering someone for the first time, (2) the difficulty of cross-class friendships, (3) and the perceived difficulty of moving between classes. We present descriptive statistics for each item in Table I.

Our final set of dependent variables concerns *class opposition*. Here we have two distinct measures. First, as an overall summary respondents were asked "how big do you think the differences are between social classes in this country". Second, we queried respondents "How much would you say that you agree or disagree with the political views of [working/middle/upper class] people", which respondents could answer on a 1-5 scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Unlike the preceding measures, these novel questions are likely to evince more specific class reactions given their greater specificity. Again, descriptive statistics for these measures are provided in Table I.

Results

Class Identification

We begin by discussing the nature of class identification in our sample as this variable serves as our key independent variable for the analyses to come. Notably, as shown in Table I,

only 2.7 per cent of respondents failed to provide an answer to this question. That the vast majority of respondents were able to relate to class at this basic level further supports the contention that class consciousness may be more vibrant than some have suggested. Looking at the substantive responses, we observe a strong tendency for Danes to associate themselves with the middle class either simply as ‘middle class’ or one of the gradated versions (lower or upper). A working-class identity is only chosen by some 12 per cent of the sample, which is comparable to the level observed in countries such as Sweden and Switzerland (Andersen and Curtis 2012, 133). While not strictly part of our research agenda in this context, analyses shown in the Supplementary Materials show class identification to be meaningfully associated with objective indicators of class (occupation, income, and education). All in all, thus, we feel justified in concluding that (not least middle) class identification can be identified in our sample. Due to the low number of responses in the two extreme class categories, we combine the lower and working class categories as well as the upper and upper middle class categories in the analyses below.

Social Class Associations

Our respondents readily assigned to themselves a class label, but this does not tell us what these labels signify to the respondents. To understand these class labels we can first turn to the open-ended class association measures described earlier. These open-ended responses were coded by three student coders working from a detailed codebook with 11 main categories (see the Supplementary Materials).^{vi} Up to four different codes were noted for each response (e.g., if someone answered ‘A highly educated, wealthy businessman’ three codes would be applied for, respectively, education, income/wealth, and occupation). In Table II, we have collapsed some of the smaller codes for clarity so that the table shows the percentage of respondents who mention each of 9 categories in relation to each of the three classes (responses sum to more than 100 since

more than one code was used for many respondents – the average is just below two for all three classes).

INSERT TABLE II

Two key results emerge from Table II. First, the share of missing answers or don't knows is relatively modest considering that the postal survey mode required respondents to take the time and effort to write down their associations by hand. That the clear majority of respondent answered provides initial evidence that the concept of class (still) has meaning to people in an advanced, industrial democracy. The second key result in Table II is that responses were substantially meaningful considering classic debates regarding social class. More than 80 per cent of respondents provided an answer mentioning at least one of the four class characteristics at the center of scholarly understandings of class: income and wealth, education, occupation, and family background (see, e.g., Centers 1949; Evans and Tilley 2017; Goldthorpe et al. 1969; Hout 2008; Jackman 1979; Marshall et al. 1988). Occupation was the dominant factor in descriptions of all three classes with most respondents referring to factors related to occupation when describing the three classes.^{vii} Income/wealth and education were also mentioned a good deal, although family background played only a minor role in the respondents' understanding of social class. Notably, Figure I shows that this emphasis on the traditional 'ingredients' of social classes was fairly uniform across respondent class identities. While working-class respondents tend to refer to the personality of class members more frequently than do identifiers with the other social classes, as indicated by the higher rates for 'Other' in Figure I, the distribution of attention is nevertheless quite similar across class identities.

INSERT FIGURE I

To pry further into perceptions of members of social classes we next turn to our class stereotype measures. As we expected, there is a sharp division in ratings of both the working and upper classes, with the former rated substantially lower on the competence dimension than the warmth dimension and vice versa for the upper class; see Table I. The difference in evaluations in the latter case is particularly noticeable with respondents placing the upper class nearly 1.5 scale points more positively on the competence dimension than the warmth. Most respondents, in other words, perceive people in general as wary of members of the upper class and potentially friendlier toward those from the working class. Just as expected, the ratings of the middle class are more similar across the two stereotype dimensions, once again suggesting the role of the middle class as a positive social reference group. The key point here is that respondents are discriminating across class groups and are doing so in the theoretically expected manner; that is, we can observe the existence of class consciousness in these responses.

We examine the conditioning role of subjective identification in Figure II, which plots the predicted stereotype rating for all three classes by respondent class identification; results stem from OLS regressions, provided in the Appendix for the sake of brevity, that also control for respondent education, income, age, gender, occupation, father's occupation, and the respondent's perception of their childhood economic conditions. Perhaps the key point communicated by Figure II, as with the open-ended items above, is the similarity in response across class identification. Respondents, regardless of their own class identification, tend to believe that people in general see the working class as warm but not competent, the upper class as competent but cold, and evaluate the middle class positively on both stereotype dimensions. While there is some tendency for working class respondents to evaluate the working class more positively on

both stereotype dimensions, this difference is not statistically significant when controls are included in the model. Class stereotypes appear to be relatively uniformly shared.

INSERT FIGURE II

Taken together, Table II and Figures I and II provide two important findings. First, our respondents were quite able to make associations between social classes and social characteristics and, indeed, did so in a manner consistent with academic research on the concept of social class. And, secondly, these perceptions were broadly consensual across social class identities, signifying a common, and still available, source for these beliefs about social classes. These results stand in marked contrast with the claims that social class is ‘dead’ or otherwise inert in the minds of individuals within affluent Western societies.

Perceptions of Social Class Boundaries

The working, middle, and upper classes have a clear, and largely similar, meaning for respondents on our survey. We now turn to the question of whether respondents perceive clear boundaries *between* the classes. Our focus here lies with three items found in Table I—whether the individual indicated that they notice the social class of new acquaintances, the difficulty of cross-class friendships, and the difficulty of class mobility. Again, it is worth paying attention to the rather modest share of non-responses across almost all the indicators in Table I. This reinforces the interpretation that our respondents had little difficulty relating to class and class relations. Turning to the distribution of responses across the substantive categories, the basic takeaway is that many individuals do see clear differences between the classes, and are aware of it in their everyday lives. While most respondents (i.e., close to 2/3) would not see much difficulty in having friends across class boundaries, majorities of respondents both notice other people’s class at least sometimes and indicate that it is at least quite hard to move across these

boundaries. Table I shows that many of the respondents to our survey possess a picture of social class boundaries that may be relevant for their subsequent social and political evaluations.

INSERT TABLE III

Do perceptions of class boundaries vary by class identification? We analyzed each dependent variable using an ordinal logit model with subjective class identification and the same control variables used earlier; see Table III for the results pertaining to class identification. Notably, Table III shows only modest class-based differences in perceptions of class boundaries. For instance, upper middle/upper class respondents were, on average, approximately 7-12% less likely to say that it is “fairly” or “very” difficult to move between classes than respondents from the other social classes, but the confidence interval for this estimate overlaps with those for the other classes. Table III suggests that, much as with their understandings of what class means, our respondents broadly agree on the extent to which classes are distinct within Danish society.

Perceptions of Class Opposition

Regardless of their class identity, respondents on our survey broadly agree about the meaning of and potential boundaries between social classes in Denmark. We now examine whether respondents perceive these distinct social classes as greatly different from one another and how they perceive their own political allegiances within this structure. In the former case, just over half of our sample indicated that the difference between social differences in Denmark were “large” or “very large” (see Table I). We analyzed responses to this item using an ordinal logit model and the controls used in previous models; the first column of Table IV provides results pertaining to class identity and shows that the likelihood of giving either of these responses was strongly related to the class identify of the respondent in question. For instance, those in the lower/working class have an average predicted probability of offering either of these

responses of 0.74 [0.66, 0.83], which is twenty percentage points greater than the probability among the lower middle or middle classes and thirty percentage points greater than the likelihood of those in the upper middle/upper class. While these respondents may broadly agree about what constitutes the working/middle/upper classes, they certainly disagree about the proximity of these classes in society.

INSERT TABLE IV

Our second set of measures in this domain focus on how individuals subsequently align themselves within this differentiated class system. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed with the three social classes on political matters. In the aggregate respondents were most likely to say they agreed with the middle class (M=3.40 [SD:0.72]) followed by the working (M=3.05 [SD:0.94]) and then the upper class (M=2.63 [SD:1.06]; see Table I). Respondents are clearly differentiating between the social classes on this front. Importantly, class identity is related to this differentiation in the manner we expected as Table IV shows. Working class respondents were substantially more likely to indicate that they agree or strongly agree with the working class than individuals higher up the class ladder, while the inverse pattern emerges for the middle and, especially, the upper class. These differences can be quite substantial. For instance, a respondent with a working-class identity is predicted to be, on average, approximately 27% *more* likely to indicate agreement with the working class than someone in the upper middle/upper class and approximately 20% *less* likely to report agreement with the upper class than these individuals. Individuals seem to be displaying clear class group allegiances in these models.^{viii}

The results in Tables I and IV clearly stand in contrast to the claims of those arguing for the death of class. Many individuals perceive there to be sizable differences between the classes.

They also readily indicate a closer allegiance to some classes rather than others. Moreover, these perceptions are meaningfully related to the respondent's own class identification.

Conclusion

Social class is traditionally one of the most important predictors of social and political evaluations and behavior. However, the continuing relevance of this key variable has been called into question by a range of theoretical as well as empirical contributions over the past three decades – some even proclaiming the death of class (e.g. Clark, Lipset, and Rempel 1993; Clark and Lipset 1991). In this article, we have provided evidence to the contrary by showing that Danish citizens continue to hold (intelligible) conceptions of classes and to identify with and discriminate between social classes. Thus, many Danish citizens continue to indicate that class boundaries are real and rigid. They also report theoretically consistent beliefs regarding the content of class identities that we believe are likely to play a crucial role in affecting their resulting political evaluations. In short, we find class consciousness to be alive and well in citizens' minds. Given the paucity of recent work on class consciousness in the Danish context, this is interesting in itself.

Absolute levels are, of course, always open to discussion and skeptics may see the glass as half empty rather than half full. However, there can be no discussion that our representative group of respondents is able to attribute meaning to class terms – a meaning, furthermore, that seems to fit the perceptions of standard social science accounts. This is even more remarkable given that our case, Denmark, is a highly affluent nation with relatively low levels of economic inequality, just the sort of case where the decline of class hypothesis would suggest finding little remaining class differentiation in the minds of citizens. This suggests, furthermore, that similar studies carried out in other, more unequal, societies like the United Kingdom or the USA would

uncover even stronger class perceptions and polarization. This is also what is indicated by the few studies that take comparable, yet different, approaches (Evans and Tilley 2017; Hout 2008; Reay 2005; Surridge 2007).

What these studies have in common with the present – in addition to results pointing in the same general direction – is the focus on the subjective side of class or class consciousness. Citizens' perceptions, thus, seem to be a key aspect to attend to for analyses of the relationship between class and politics. While this aspect has been neglected in most extant work, the results presented above contribute to a re-emerging field of research where class is not reified by reducing it to its objective roots. Although these roots are of course related to subjective identifications and perceptions (as our analyses show), they are not the whole story and by disregarding the subjective, consciousness aspect of class the mainstream of studies may be systematically underestimating the effect of class on social behavior.

While we have shown that Danish citizens still maintain class identities, coherent and consensual perceptions of social classes, and identity-associated class opposition beliefs, we believe a crucial area for future research concerns the class to politics link. When and how do these perceptions of social classes guide citizens' political behaviors? On this front the linkage may not be straightforward as it may require additional perceptions not queried here, such as the belief that class positions in society are unfair or illegitimate (Evans 1997). Moreover, future work will need to explore the nature of people's perceptions of party-class linkages, and how the actions of political parties influence such beliefs, as these should be crucial mediators between class consciousness and political behavior (Evans 2000; Evans and Tilley 2017). While the full realization of the potential of class consciousness is up to future work, we believe this article to

be a crucial first step on the path to showing the continuing relevance of social class in social evaluations.

Notes

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- ⁱ Indeed, much of the recent work that has attempted to rebut this argument is also predicted on inferences made from the relationship between objective indicators and behavior (e.g. Andersen, Yang, and Heath 2006; G. Evans and Tilley 2011, 2012; but see: Hout 2008).
- ⁱⁱ We should make clear, though, that given our quantitative empirical approach we are not able to engage in the type of in-depth, ethnographic type of analysis that some authors (see, e.g., Marshall 1983) have suggested as appropriate for investigating class consciousness.
- ⁱⁱⁱ From a Marxist perspective, likewise, the middle class occupies somewhat of a neutral position with respect to the main social conflict between workers and capitalists. This should result in the same stereotype configuration.
- ^{iv} 44 questionnaires were sent back as impossible to deliver and another 45 individuals were struck because the individuals, a relative, or employees of care-institutions responded to say that the sampled individual was unable to answer the questionnaire due to serious physical or mental disabilities.
- ^v Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the respective dimensions are: Working Class: Warmth (0.72), Competence (0.70); Middle Class: Warmth (0.76), Competence (0.78); Upper Class: Warmth (0.79), Competence (0.84). The two indices correlate moderately with one another for the working ($r = 0.44$) and middle classes ($r = 0.44$) but much more weakly for the upper class ($r = 0.17$).
- ^{vi} Tests of intercoder reliability conducted by double-coding 10% of the material show a satisfactory level of reliability in that coders agree about more than 87% of the codes.
- ^{vii} Answers include such occupations as craftsman or factory worker (working class), teacher or nurse (middle class), and CEOs or solicitors (upper class).
- ^{viii} The same pattern emerges when we look at the *relative* levels of agreement as indicated by measures wherein we subtract a respondent's perceived level of agreement with the upper class with their perceived level of agreement with the working class. Working class respondents indicate substantially greater agreement with the working than upper class, while the inverse occurs for the middle and upper-middle classes.

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Table I: Indicators of Class Identification and Class Consciousness, Per Cent and Scale Means

Class Identification			
“Sometimes there is talk of different social groups or social classes. If you were to place yourself in such a social class which of these would it then be?”.	The Lower Class		1.71
	The Working Class		12.22
	The Lower Middle Class		11.9
	The Middle Class		49.23
	The Upper Middle Class		21.03
	The Upper Class		1.22
	DK or Unanswered		2.69
Class Associations: Stereotypes			
	Working Class	Middle Class	Upper Class
Warmth Stereotypes	3.33 (0.54)	3.29 (0.51)	2.56 (0.65)
Competence Stereotypes	2.75 (0.60)	3.37 (0.47)	3.84 (0.62)
Class Boundaries			
When you meet someone the first time, how often do you notice their social class?	Usually		18.17
	Sometimes		53.3
	Never		24.04
	DK		4.48
How easy is it to have friends from other social classes?	Would be difficult		3.5
	Might be difficult		25.43
	No Difficulty		64.96
	DK		6.11
How difficult would you say it is to move between classes?	Very		4.48
	Quite		50.37
	Not Very		36.35
	DK		8.8
Class Opposition			
How big do you think the differences are between social classes in this country?	Very Large		6.28
	Sizable		43.77
	Not Particularly Large		43.77
	No Differences		0.41
	DK		5.79
“How much would you say that you agree or disagree with the political views of [working/middle/upper class] people”	Working Class	Middle Class	Upper Class
	3.05 (0.94)	3.40 (0.72)	2.63 (1.06)

Note: N = 1,227. Cell entries are either mean responses (with standard deviations in parentheses) or tabulations of answers (as percentages) to the questions listed in bold.

Table II: Class Associations, Per Cent Mentioning Each Category.

	<i>The working class</i>	<i>The middle class</i>	<i>The upper class</i>
1. Income and wealth	13.1	19.5	34.6
2. Education	17.0	29.4	22.2
3. Occupation	71.0	55.7	52.1
4. Family background	1.2	0.6	8.3
At least one of 1-4	80.2	80.2	84.7
5. Lifestyle	12.0	19.1	20.0
6. Ranking in society, self-reference	6.9	12.8	6.9
7. Politics	5.4	1.4	1.3
8. Personality	15.2	11.5	17.1
9. Don't know, 'there are no classes', etc.	5.2	2.5	2.5
No answer	12.6	16.0	15.4

Note: N = 1,227. Entries are percentages of respondents who mention a given category. The percentage base for categories 1-9 exclude respondents who did not provide an answer at all, i.e. the bottom row.

Table III. Class Identification and Class Boundaries

	Notice Class when Meeting Someone?	Difficult to have Cross-Class Friendships?	How Difficult to Move Between Classes?
Average Predicted Probability of Saying...			
	“Usually”	“Might be” or “Would Be”	“Fairly” or “Very”
Working Class	0.15 [0.09, 0.20]	0.38 [0.28, 0.48]	0.67 [0.56, 0.77]
Lower Middle	0.17 [0.11, 0.23]	0.29 [0.20, 0.38]	0.65 [0.55, 0.75]
Middle	0.19 [0.16, 0.22]	0.28 [0.24, 0.32]	0.62 [0.57, 0.67]
Upper	0.22 [0.17, 0.27]	0.32 [0.25, 0.39]	0.55 [0.47, 0.62]
Observations	852	838	812
Controls Included?	Yes	Yes	Yes

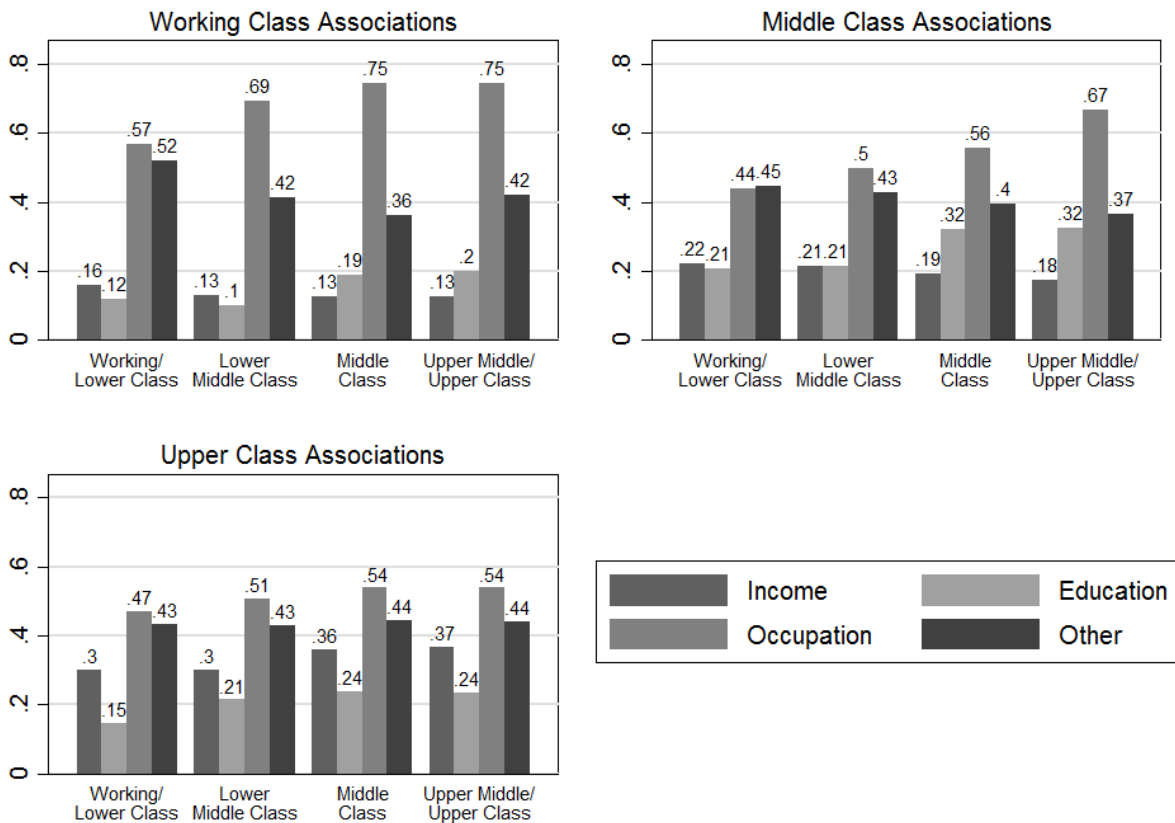
Note: Cell entries are average predicted probabilities of the respondent providing the response option in question with 95% confidence intervals in brackets. Results stem from ordinal logit models, which can be found in Appendix Table A5.

Table IV. Class Difference Beliefs by Class Identification

	Differences btn. Classes	Agree with WC	Agree with MC	Agree with UC
Average Predicted Probability of Saying...				
	“Large” or “Very Large”	“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”	“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”	“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”
Lower/Working Class	0.74 [0.66, 0.83]	0.53 [0.42, 0.64]	0.33 [0.23, 0.44]	0.12 [0.07, 0.16]
Lower Middle Class	0.54 [0.44, 0.64]	0.43 [0.33, 0.54]	0.38 [0.28, 0.48]	0.14 [0.08, 0.19]
Middle Class	0.52 [0.47, 0.56]	0.37 [0.32, 0.41]	0.52 [0.47, 0.57]	0.21 [0.18, 0.25]
Upper Middle / Upper Class	0.42 [0.35, 0.50]	0.25 [0.19, 0.30]	0.50 [0.42, 0.57]	0.32 [0.26, 0.38]
Observations	841	752	757	731
Controls Included?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

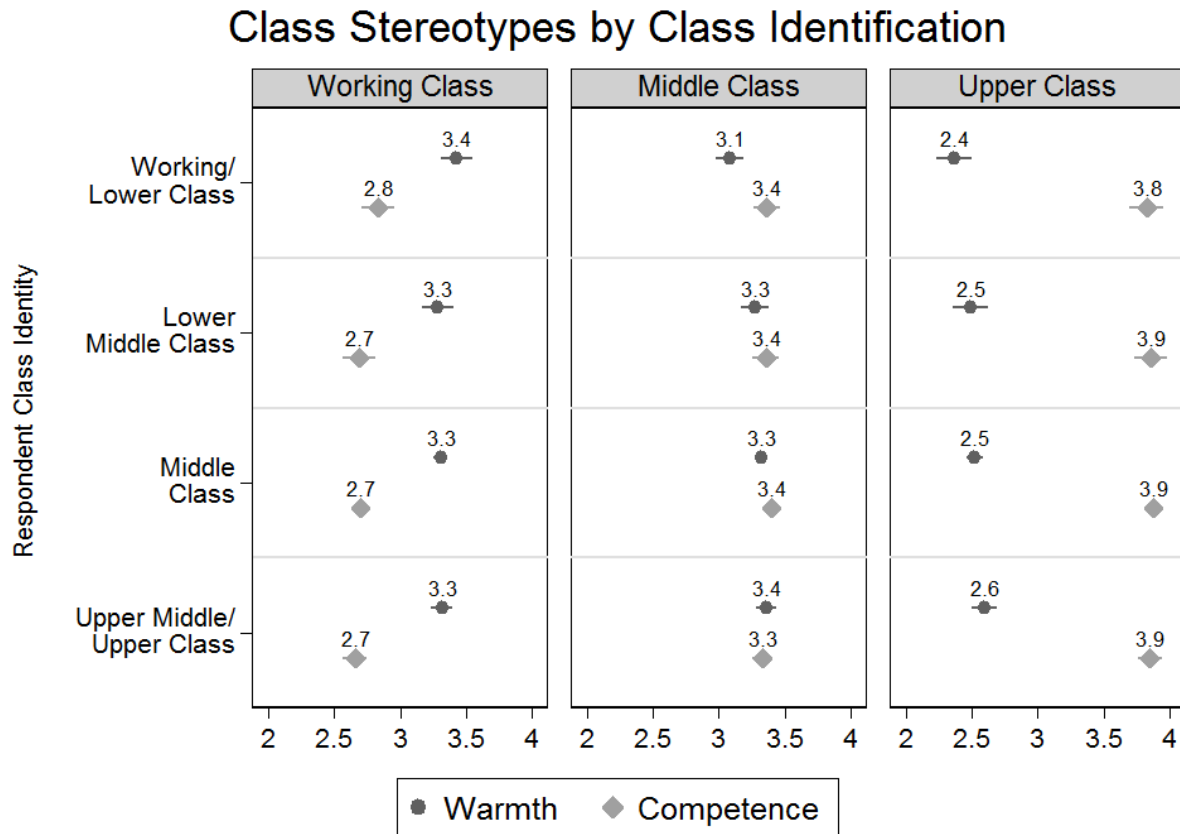
Note: Cell entries are average predicted probabilities of the respondent providing the response option in question with 95% confidence intervals in brackets. Results stem from ordinal logit models, which can be found in Appendix Table A6. WC = Working Class, MC = Middle Class, UC = Upper Class

Figure I: Class Identification and Class Associations, Per Cent



Note: Entries are percentages of respondents who mention a given category.

Figure II: Class Identification and Class Stereotypes, Scale Scores



Note: Markers provide the predicted value on the stereotype dimension with 95 per cent confidence intervals. The dimensions can vary from 1 to 5. Full model results can be found in Tables A2-A4 in the Appendix.