Editorial: Class and Psychology

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The Place of Class: Considerations for Psychology

Abstract

The concept of social class has not featured as prominently in psychology as it has in the broader social sciences. This editorial provides an overview of the concept of social class and its relevance to contemporary psychology. Although far from exhaustive, the editorial considers key developments in class theory and research, paying particular attention to scholarly advances within psychology. An introduction to the six articles contained within this collection is also provided.

Keywords: class theory, hierarchies, socioeconomic

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Background to the Special Issue

The concept of class is often used in the social sciences to invoke economic and cultural influences on the positioning of particular groups within social hierarchies (Argyle, 1994; Bourdieu, 1987; Centers, 1949; Marx & Engels, 1848/1998; Michels, 2013; Savage et al., 2013; Skeggs, 2004; Standing, 2011b; Walkerdine, 1992). Any cursory look at writing on social class quickly reveals the complex and contested nature of this concept as reflected in classic and contemporary scholarship. These complexities are compounded when we consider contemporary discussions of the intersections of social class, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and place in influencing the positioning of different social actors within socioeconomic hierarchies both within and across societies (Anthias, 2012; Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, et al., 2012; Balcazar, Taylor-Ritzler, et al., 2012; Reay, 2013). Scholars have also been engaged with theorizing and documenting contemporary class formations in the context of neoliberalism and globalisation (Fryer & Stambe, 2014; Hall, Massey, & Rustin, 2013; Little, 2014).

At its core, social class theory is concerned with the effects of social and economic stratification on people and society. For over 150 years philosophers and social scientists have demonstrated that engagements with issues of social class do not simply comprise a spectator sport. For example, Marx (1895/1962) initially developed his historical materialist/economic theory of class as part of an effort to challenge socio-economic oppression and support the development of a more equitable society. This was a theory developed in the context of a period of extreme inequality and austerity during the growth of manufacturing capitalism. Such features remain relevant today, sparking renewed interest in class theory, research, and activism. A key focus for Marx was on the organization and control of the means of production (businesses) in society at the time and how the rewards of commerce were concentrated among elites. The generally accepted view is that Marx

identified two social classes (Marx, 1895/1962; Marx & Engels, 1848/1998): the proletariat or workers (working class) and the bourgeoisie or owners of the means of production. Marx's conflict-orientated theory focused on the antagonistic relationship stemming from the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Famously, Marx proposed that when the proletariat united in rebellion against the exploitative conditions of their existence, this would result in a new and more equitable society characterized by the shared collective ownership of the means of production.

Marx was engaged in mapping the emergence of the capitalist system, understanding its operation, the conditions of its reproduction, and its overthrow (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1978). From the outset debate ensued. Some of Marx's ideas were expanded and others challenged by early social theorists such as Weber, who read in the work of Marx an overly narrow understanding of social stratification that hampered progressive developments towards a more equitable society (Weber, 1922/1978). Weber argued that control, or a lack of control, of the means of production was only one of three core components that shape a person's social class. Accordingly, cultural factors such as prestige, political power, and wealth - including control of other forms of property and assets – also shape one's social class position within the socio-economic hierarchy. After all, people who coordinate businesses that they do not own (e.g., managers) also benefit from the consolidated control of the means of production, along with the owners of such businesses.

Early class theorists such as Marx and Weber set the stage for a raft of subsequent theoretical and empirical investigations into the positioning of various groups within the social formations of class, gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and disability, and how this impacts on people's differential access to power, prestige, employment, money, housing, food, education, healthcare, opportunities in life, and various goods and services (e.g., Anthias, 2012; Argyle, 1994; Balcazar, Suarez-Balcazar, et al., 2012; Balcazar, Taylor-Ritzler, et al., 2012; Bourdieu, 1984, 1987; Centers, 1949; Griffin, 2011; Michels, 2013; Reay, 2013; Rollock, 2014; Savage et al., 2013; Skeggs, 2004; Standing, 2011b). At its core, such

scholarship remains committed to engaging with the complexities of social hierarchies, inequalities, and promoting social change (see sections below). Such efforts to connect the personal with the social have been most influential in sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, and economics-related disciplines. Psychology has devoted relatively less attention to the analysis of social relations around class, status, and stratification, and has made a lesser contribution to work in this area, with some notable exceptions, primarily from feminist, community, and critical social psychologies (e.g., Argyle, 1994; Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Centers, 1949; Lucey, Melody, & Walkerdine, 2003; Parker & Spears, 1996; Walkerdine, 1992, 1996, 2015).

There is rising global discontent with neoliberalism, corporate welfare, and increased wealth concentration among elites alongside austerity measures imposed on the populace. Such worldwide issues, and the emergence of "gangster capitalism" (Rowbotham, Segal, Wainright, & Patel, 2014), are intensifying efforts to enrich our understandings of social hierarchies. In the current epoch of increasing social divisions and inequalities associated with neoliberalism[i], a focus on social class is more pressing than ever (Hall, 2011; Hall et al., 2013; Midlands Psychology Group, 2014; Sennett, 2006). Particularly relevant here are recent works on late modernity (Giddens, 1991), flexible or liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000), risk society (Beck, 1992) neoliberalism (Rose, 1989), new cultural theories of class and intersectionality (Anthias, 2013; Lawler, 2005; Savage et al., 2003; Skeggs, 2004). This work has been informed by the scholarship of Bourdieu (1984, 1987) that in many respects continues the work of Weber (1922/1978), alongside the influential neo-Marxist approach of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which drew on Gramsci's notion of hegemony (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978; Race and Politics Group, 1982; Women's Studies Group, 1978), and the work of Michel Foucault (1977a, 1977b).

While we are critical of our discipline's lack of sustained engagement with issues of social class, it is important to note that psychology has a long-standing tradition of progressive work that is influenced by class theory. Much of this scholarship documents the impacts of status hierarchies and economic inequalities on people's lives, and offers

avenues for action and social change (Hodgetts et al., 2010). This includes the project on the psychological and social impacts of long term male unemployment in 1930s Marienthal, Austria (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, & Zeisel, 1933/1971), which was an early example of community psychology (Fryer & Ullah, 1987). This work involved participative action research, service provisions, and the development of ideological critiques in order to investigate and address the impacts of deprivation and economic turmoil on this community.

Despite a long history of engaging with related topics such as poverty, crowds, stigma, inequalities, unemployment, and exclusion (Fryer & Stambe, 2014; Griffin, 2011; Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Groot, & Tankel, 2013; Jahoda et al., 1933/1971), mainstream psychology has tended to shy away from engaging directly with social class theory in any depth. For example, we have not yet explored fully the ways in which class operates in everyday social relations, caste systems, waged labour markets, in relation to distinctions of "taste," patterns of consumption, riots and protests, classed identities, or representations of class in popular culture. However, issues of social class have been researched indirectly via analyses of people's membership of groups with similar material living conditions, as is manifested in distinct styles of dress, identities, manners, and ways of engaging in the world (Griffin, 1985, 2000, 2011; Hodgetts et al., 2011, 2013; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2012). Class has also been understood in relation to the operation of powerful representational discourses, delineating "appropriate" and "inappropriate" styles of speech, social interaction, appearance, and behaviour in a range of contexts (Barnes & Milovanovic, 2015; Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002; G. Thomas, 2014). On the disciplinary periphery, psychologists have offered some detailed explorations of the daily experiences, practices, and the distinctive class-based ways of conducting everyday life.

The relative neglect of class in the discipline of psychology is particularly regrettable given the extensive analysis of the operation of the "psy-complex" and psychological perspectives in pathologizing, treating, and punishing lower class people in the labour market and within the mental health, education, finance, prison, and judicial systems (Cromby & Willis, 2014; Parker, 2007; Rose, 1989). On balance mainstream psychology has

more often been utilized to advance the interests of the middle classes, elites, and to endorse the status quo, rather than the interests of lower class and marginalized people. Studies focused on issues of education, sexuality, and mental health have examined the damaging psycho-social impacts of class for working class people, and how these are lived with, transformed, and overcome (Layton, 2014a, 2014b; Reay, 2013; Walkerdine, 1997), including how these patterns might be transmitted across generations (Walkerdine, 2015; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012).

Academics and activists have also explored the psycho-social dimensions of class, especially as these intersect with gender and to a lesser extent ethnicity (see next section on intersectional scholarship). Some of this work has also drawn on insights from post/neo-Freudian theory and practice, notably Klein's Object Relations Theory and Lacanian approaches, as well as feminist perspectives (Layton, 2014a, 2014b; Walkerdine, 2015). Sociologists have also written on the "hidden" psychological injuries of social class (Sennett & Cobb, 1977) to explain how, beyond the material hardships of poverty, working class people also suffer from a lack of dignity and legitimacy in the eyes of wider society. More recently, these ideas have been drawn on in psychology to highlight the psychological and social damage that contemporary capitalism inflicts on working class people (Hodgetts et al., 2014; Walker, 2011, 2012; Walker, Cunningham, Hanna, & Ambrose, 2015).

Our discipline is changing and we detect renewed interest in social class within psychology (e.g., Midlands Psychology Group, 2014). In re-engaging with the concept of social class, this edition contributes to the questioning of, and resistance to, the inequalities produced by the present global economic system. Further, it is important for psychologists to engage with and develop contemporary understandings of social class in order to ensure that our discipline has the means to theorize the psychological, material, social, and cultural indices of class; to develop a distinctively psychological input into contemporary understandings of social class; to promote engagements with social classes that promote inclusion and which are less classist; and to include an appreciation of the potential impact of social class where it might be relevant. As such, this special Issue provides an important

means of redressing the relative lack of focus on social class in psychology. Contributors explore the ways in which social class is mobilized and experienced by people in different contexts, and in so doing document the social and psychological dimensions of class in relation to theory, research, and practice in psychology. Specific aims of the collection are to advance the understanding of social class as a concept that is foundational to psychology, explore the operation of the "psy-complex" and the role of psychology in constituting and policing class relations, and to showcase exemplary theoretical developments and empirical studies of research into social class from a psychological perspective.

Before outlining each contribution to the special issue we provide further conceptual background to contemporary developments in class theory and research, as well as considering the dangers of psychologizing class.

Conceptualizing Social Class Intersections

Class remains a polysemic construct that focuses us on how the personal is interwoven with the social. Class is at once part of the broader social landscape and something that gets under the skin and into our very being. The concept provides a means of understanding group affiliation, intergroup relations, and social inequalities. Many contemporary approaches to class focus on networks of inequalities that include economic, cultural, and ideological processes. This combination of economic and cultural dimensions is important because a solely economic framing of social class risks missing the important ways in which class relations are experienced, reproduced, negotiated, and transformed in everyday life. Below we consider four key challenges in theorizing class for contemporary psychology. There is a need to (a) continue theorizing class in the context of contemporary societies shaped by neoliberalism, in which traditional class formations have been disrupted; (b) understand class in intersectional terms in order to extend understandings of how different social relations of exploitation and inequality can work in concert to exacerbate disadvantage and shore up power; (c) engage with the continuing tendency to individualize class relations

and pathologize working class groups as a means of overlooking the operation of structural inequalities; and (d) engage critically with issues of class and social mobility, classed practices in everyday life, and class as a discursive frame that is constituted in particular ways and mobilized differently in particular contexts.

Since WWII, significant societal changes including the advances of technology and capitalism, de/neo-colonialization, an expanding consumer culture, globalization, and the spread of neoliberalism mean that traditional conceptualizations of class structure have needed to be reworked (Neilson, 2015). Sociological research has tried to move beyond the traditional identification of people's (usually men's) social class based on their occupational (and educational) status (e.g., Dorling, 2014), drawing on Bourdieu's work as a means of classifying class according to consumption patterns and the highly classed notion of "taste" (Bourdieu, 1984; Bennett et al., 2009). More recently we have seen a focus on theorizing neoliberalism as a system that is "grounded in the 'free, possessive individual,' with the state cast as tyrannical and oppressive" (Hall, 2011, p. 10; Hall et al., 2013). Other related work has identified an emerging global distinction between elites and the precariat. The precariat comprise a social class of "denzins" who occupy social spaces of adversity, whose very rights as citizens are brought into question, and who live insecure lives characterized by no or only short-term employment and often lack the education and social contacts necessary for social mobility (Standing, 2011b; Walkerdine, 2015).

An additional approach has been the various cultural theories of class, influenced by the work of Weber, Marx, Hoggart (1957) and others from cultural studies. Hoggart's argument that "high" and "low" culture is fundamentally classed paved the way for subsequent work by Stuart Hall and others at Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the UK (e.g., Hall et al., 1978; Hebdige, 1979; Race & Politics Group, 1982; Women's Studies Group, 1978). These neo-Marxist scholars viewed class as a cultural phenomenon, in addition to the traditional economic focus of the classic Marxist approach. A key argument here was that a person's class could no longer be "read off" from their occupational and/or educational status in a straightforward way, and that classed relations of power and

resistance also operate in the cultural realm. However, these approaches had relatively little to say about the role of psychology in sustaining, transforming, and reinforcing class relations in the cultural domain. Moreover, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that, in the context of increasing consumerism, recession, and labour market reforms, people's occupations and employment situations are still critical factors in their economic and social positioning (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997).

In the wake of recent financial crises, there has been renewed interest in theorizing and researching the concept of social class, with current scholarship taking us beyond traditional debates over Marxism, employment relations, and further into issues of inequality, gender, transnationalism, disability, and culture (Anthias, 2012, 2013; Campbell, 2014; Dorling, 2014; Reay, 2013; Savage et al., 2013). Contemporary work is bridging the divide between what we might call economic/materialist and culturalist traditions in class theory (Willis, 1977). Scholars have sought to respond to the ways in which economic relations are shaped by socio-cultural understandings that have material implications for resource distribution and peoples' lives. A central concern here has been the ways in which class intersects with different, but interrelated, social categories of oppression—including gender, ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality—that work in concert in the constitution of lives, social relations, discrimination, and inequalities (Anthias, 2012). What is generally termed the intersectional approach to social class was developed initially in response to the gendered and classed experiences of women of colour (Collins, 1999; Moolman, 2013). The purpose was to offer more grounded and complex accounts of the hypocrisy and injustice of relations of power leading to exploitation, inequality, and oppression in society. Research reveals how various intersections are played out through everyday practices and relationships that enact and reproduce social hierarchies (Anthias, 2013; Moolman, 2013; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). Such hierarchies by no means constitute inert or natural structures as some evolutionary psychologists might have us believe. As Campbell (2014) and others have argued, "Neoliberal capitalism radiates violence" (p. 12), produces inequalities globally, reshapes class relations, and produces injustces for the benefit of elites. Further, the post-

Cold War world is plagued by "new wars" that are frequently characterised by the rape of poor women on a mass scale (Kaldor, 2007). The precariat and the global elite classes (who benefit from the exploitation of the precariat) are not race or gender-neutral: the former involves predominantly female, poor women of colour, and the latter is primarily made up of Anglo men from the so called "developed world" (Neilson, 2015; Standing, 2011b).

Feminist scholars have done important work on social class intersections (Anthias, 2012, 2013; Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Walkerdine et al., 2001). For example, Griffin (1985, 1993, 2000, 2011) explores the operation of social relations around class, gender, and sexuality in young people's lives, and highlights the importance of class as a discursive frame shaping government policies, practice, and academic research on young people's position in education, family life, and the labour market. Outside of psychology, Anthias (2013) outlines an approach to intersections of class, gender, sexuality, and race that explores technologies of structural violence (cf. Hodgetts et al., 2013). Anthias retains a focus on the "new political economy" (see Neilson, 2015), which positions the economy as a culturally embedded entity. Concomitantly, Anthias also considers the broader landscapes of power that produces various dynamic "social locations" for actual people at the intersections between class, ethnicity, and gender. Class is approached as a relational and emplaced process. As Anthias (2013) argues:

> One way of thinking about these hierarchical social locations is to treat them as products of particular constellations of social relations, and in terms of relationality and experience at determined points in time, that is, to locate them within a spatial and chronographic context. (p. 15)

From this intersectional perspective, a key focus is on how social class influences emerge in concert with other axes of (dis)advantage across a range of social spaces. This spatially orientated relational approach maintains that the ethnic and gendered dimensions that shape people's class positions are dynamic and can change across different contexts and

interactions with different social groups. For example, a young female migrant labourer from Samoa can inhabit a subordinated class position in New Zealand and simultaneously occupy a position of increased class mobility in Samoa due to her increased relative income. Across settings, this same person can demonstrate different levels of social (social networks and connections), cultural (educational success and ability to appreciate cultural artefacts), and economic (wealth) capital (see Bourdieu, 1984, 1987). Reflecting this orientation towards relationships and places, psychologists have demonstrated the usefulness of exploring the ways in which class is constituted and mobilized across different leisure contexts where some classes are welcome and others excluded (Brown & Griffin, 2009; Croghan et al., 2007; Holt & Griffin, 2003).

Intersectional work on class in psychology has been informed by Pierre Bourdieu's (1984, 1987) attempts to unravel the complexities surrounding the reproduction of privilege, power, and subordination that is perpetuated by the inequitable distribution of social, cultural, and economic resources between social classes. Bourdieu proposed that rather than constituting a homogenous object of social research, class constitutes a social space that is cultivated through ongoing interpersonal interactions and intra and inter group relations. Such spaces are co-constructed by people through daily practices and are influenced by broader institutions in society and the availability of social, cultural, and economic capitals. Bourdieu drew directly on the work of Erving Goffman and the idea that people have a "sense of one's place" in the social universe that is often anchored in groups, and which can manifest in particular settings as arrogance, violence, criminal activity, rioting, and timid behaviour. Within the social spaces that are constituted as classes, people come to experience sameness and difference, attraction and revulsion depending on the class status of those around them. As Bourdieu (1987) explains:

This sense of one's place is at the same time a sense of the place of others, and, together with the affinities of habitus experienced in the form of personal attraction or revulsion, is at the root of all processes of cooptation, friendship, love, association

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etc., and thereby provides the principle of all durable alliances and connections, including legally sanctioned relationships. (p. 5)

Here, social space refers to a sense of place shared among human beings from, or currently living within, similar cultural, social psychological, and material circumstances. Rather than simply comprising an economic group, a given social class can be read as a dynamic and evolving social space. Such spaces provide a basis for affinity and social identity between group members, and processes of socialization through which one obtains a class-based habitus (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015).

The concept of habitus refers to a network of dispositions, ways of being, and tastes through which a person comes to understand and engage with the world and other people. As well as transmitting group traditions and identities, habitus also shapes imaginings of the future for members of a social class. As Allen and Hollingworth (2013) emphasize:

Habitus encapsulates how the past comes to be embodied in the present and we have suggested here that such histories must be understood to be place-bound both within material *and* subjective structures and relations. (p. 507)

The social space of a class of people and their associated habitus, therefore, becomes embodied and intertwined with their everyday lives, practices, and experiences. As we explore in the following section, the concept of habitus is also instrumental in understanding issues of social mobility as people move between classes in society.

An orientation towards classes as social spaces within which particular cultures or habitus are enacted invokes what are often termed "new cultural theories of class" (Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 2004). This approach transcends the dualisms associated with objectivist (top down/structural) and subjectivist (bottom up/experiential) perspectives on social class to explore different ways of life, tastes, and processes of social distancing and differentiation (Anthias, 2012). It also reflects the stance that class is not only based on the material

conditions and labour market position of persons, neighbourhoods, and communities, but is also based in and negotiated through everyday practices and identities. Further, class textures the landscapes of everyday life and reproduces social structures, institutions, and cultural distinctions (Hodgetts et al., 2010; Savage et al., 2013). As enacted in daily life, class proves to be at once political, material, structural, personal, emplaced, and discursive, and is deeply entwined within struggles over power, resources, inclusion, and meaning in ways that implicate gender, race, disability, sexuality, and other axes of social distinction. Briefly, we understand class as being comprised of a dynamic set of psycho-social and spatial relations based around power and the operation of economic, political, cultural, ideological, and psychic relations of domination and subordination, not simply a static typology of social status positions.

Dangers of Psychologizing Class, Behavioural Nudging and Social Mobility

Although we wish to promote psychological engagements with theory, research, and practice/activism around class issues, we also see risks in such engagements as a consequence of the individualistic and behavioural-orientated worldview that pervades our discipline (Cromby & Willis, 2014). As psychologists Parker (2007) and Burman (2008), and sociologists such as Rose (1989) have demonstrated, psychology has played a crucial role in shaping institutional practices based on classification and control in the fields of educational, developmental, and clinical psychology. These psychological disciplines display a tendency towards individualizing the causes of inequalities and oppression, marginalising and pathologizing working class people, their families, and cultures as deficient and/or deviant, enshrining white middle class values and culture as normative and ideal. Rose has drawn on Foucault's work to constitute such practices as "technologies of governmentality" (Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006).

In addition, most psychologists affiliate with the middle classes and we tend to construct our discipline from associated tastes, values, expectations, and ideologies (Parker,

2007). We need to consider how middle class taste and disgust towards working class forms

of existence or habitus might shape our work (Lawler, 2005). Psychologists could reflect

more deeply on how our discipline is deeply implicated in the monitoring of working class

groups (Rose, 1989). Psychologists are often greeted with suspicion by members of lower

classes because of our history of assisting authorities in policing their behaviours, and

working in non-participatory ways to turn "them" into versions of "ourselves" (Hodgetts et al.,

2010). The individualistic orientations to theorizing the human condition that are central to

psychology as a discipline are incomplete without attention to the socio-political and

economic systems that shape the everyday lives and very being of people with whom we

conduct research and practice.

The psychological tendency to individualize human existence can lead to forms of

victim blaming and efforts to correct the perceived moral and psychological deficiencies of

the lower classes (Anthias, 2012; Cromby & Willis, 2014; Lawler, 2005). Researchers from

other disciplines have reflected on the importance of moral dimensions of interclass

interactions from an intersectional perspective. For example, human geographers such as

Valentine and Harris (2014) set out to use "the judgements we make about others (how we

should live, what type of behaviors are good or bad) and the practices to which these

judgements give rise to explore and understand the contemporary nature of class based

prejudice" (p. 84). These authors note a current tendency, which as we will demonstrate

implicates psychologists, in justifying class prejudice and structural violence. Such prejudicial

tendencies are particularly directed at people who depend on welfare provisions resulting in

reduced care, compassion, and communal responsibility towards people in need (Hodgetts

et al., 2013).

The prominence of moral disdain towards the lower classes that comes with an

individualistic orientation has been carefully cultivated by members of the political right over

recent decades. For example, Michels (2013) charts the development of the highly racialized

concept of the "underclass" from the 1960s in the USA. Underclass theory has been

associated with a shift in class theory from focussing on social structures to viewing personal

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traits as the key cause of social inequities. The "underclass thesis" has a long history as a racialized and classed concept in the USA, mobilised as a discourse to pathologize African Americans living in poverty, especially young people (Griffin, 1993; Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). The underlying rationale is that groups in need have somehow brought their misfortune upon themselves and can therefore be held personally responsible for their predicaments. The term "underclass" constitutes unemployed people (meaning "unemployable") as existing in isolation from the rest of society and lacking "respectable" white middle class values, behaviour, and ambitions. Consequently, members of the underclass have been represented as morally depraved, criminal, work shy, engaged in antisocial behaviours, and sexually promiscuous (Michels, 2013). Despite a lack of evidence, proponents of this theory presented negative psychological traits, values, attitudes, and dysfunctional behaviours as the primary barriers preventing members of the underclass from competing with more economically successful groups. As Michels (2013) explains, the underclasses are represented as having:

> little self-discipline or determination. They lacked a plan for the future or a desire for education. They were characterized by impulsive behaviour, sometimes manifested through violence and vandalism. They were strongly inclined to sexual activities. (p. 48)

Beyond obstructing employability, underclass culture was also constructed as preventing people from benefiting from social programmes, a discourse which has been used to justify severe cuts in such programmes since the 1970s. In fact, socially progressive programmes that support people in need were recast as problematic because they are represented as causing "dependency." Edward Banfield, a Harvard University political scientist and Republican Party advisor, argued against social transfers and programs that address material deprivation (Michels, 2013). These were replaced with a focus on interventions aimed at changing the supposed work ethic and anti-social morals, attitudes, and behaviours

of underclass members to better emulate what were considered the more adaptive aspirations of the middle classes (Walkerdine, 2015).

Such developments exemplify the danger of using psychological constructs to understand social class differences. In some contexts, the increased use of behavioural technologies of psychology as a means of alleviating poverty has also been associated with a shift away from interventions seeking to change inequitable social structures towards a focus on changing the traits, attitudes, and "anti-social behaviour" of working class people. Recently, Cromby and Willis (2014) identified psychology as a technology of governmentality that is deployed by neoliberal governments through "behavioural nudging" interventions[ii] to force changes in the perceived negative traits and character of members of the lower classes. Psychological tests and behavioural change techniques are deployed to reconfigure underclass selves to better meet the dictates of the "free" market. Of particular note here are recent efforts of the UK government's *Behavioural Insights Team*. Welfare benefit claimants are required to submit themselves to online psychometric testing and to develop personal plans to address the presumed deficits in character that are identified from the use of these tests. The underlying purpose of such testing is to constitute benefit claimants in the UK as defective, needing to change their very ways of being, their habitus, and their selves in order to succeed in neoliberal society by adopting the habitus of middle class Americans (Cromby & Willis, 2014). Underlying such developments is a disabling discourse of aspiration that encourages people of more modest means "to 'become someone' when this is modelled on the image of 'someone else'" (Allen, 2013, p. 6) in order to become upwardly mobile.

Cromby and Willis (2014) are not alone in raising such concerns. K. Thomas (2011) developed the concept of "barbarism" to shed new light on the psychology of economics and welfare provision as applied to the feminization of poverty in Australia. The concept of barabarism refers to the ways in which, under neoliberalism, single mothers with young children are demonized and constructed as being promiscuous, economically "unproductive," and "unworthy." As a result, these families are subject to vicious, callous, overbearing, cruel, and controlling measures that Hodgetts and colleagues (2013) have referred to as key

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components of structural violence, and Cromby and Willis (2014) and Standing (2011a) refer to as "behavioral nudging." In "managing" such mothers, emphasis is placed on the supposed lack of a work ethic, aspirations, and willingness to lift themselves out of poverty without being "incentivised" (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013).

The aspirational discourse is combined with rhetoric around the importance of lower class groups engaging fully in education in order to obtain a middle class cultural capital that is presented as foundational to upward social mobility. Education involves the socializing of upwardly mobile students into the habitus of another social class (Bourdieu, 1990). Reay (2013) notes that:

> the orthodoxy is that the working classes do not need increased levels of economic and social capital as long as they develop sufficient dominant cultural capital in the form of middle-class-type attitudes and behaviours in relation to their children's education. (p. 666)

Additionally, neoliberal governments champion the need for educational participation as the key to upward mobility whilst engaging in austerity measures that remove the means of participation (Chetty, 2014; Reay, 2013). Rather than aspirations, structural factors comprise the core barriers to lower class people, particularly those of colour, from engaging fully in education. In the South African context, Chetty (2014) notes:

> The fact that it is poor and working-class youth who are resisting fee increases or limitations in terms of spaces in higher education, makes it a class struggle. This is further compounded by the fact that the majority of the students who protest are black. (p. 94)

Aspirational rhetoric ignores many of the complexities faced by parents in addressing the structural causes of poverty for their children, let alone themselves and other people around

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them (Allen, 2013). Discontent with one's lot in life under neoliberalism does motivate many precariat and working-class students to work hard to obtain more resourced lives that characterize a middle class existence (Little, 2014). However, they may not be fully aware of what this may cost them in terms of their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of those they leave behind (given there is less room the further one goes up the social hierarchy).

While reconciling who one was with who one has become, many upwardly socially mobile working class people experience family ruptures, ambivalence, self-consciousness, a profound sense of displacement, estrangement, and loss, as noted in a number of autobiographical narratives of working class feminist academics (e.g., Allen, 2013; Lawler, 2005; Reay, 2013; Steedman, 1986; Walkerdine, 1997). As noted by Allen (2013):

> The constant state of disorientation about their place in the world reveals the deep ontological insecurity experienced by children of the working class who are educationally successful or aspire to enter fields of which they are not the natural inhabitants. (p. 17)

There is an assumption built into the rhetoric of social mobility and aspiration that people further up the class hierarchy are somehow better than those lower down. Rather than being truly aspirational, this educational mission is also one of civilizing supposedly defective individuals from the lower classes (Chetty, 2014). Reay (2013) challenges the assumption that precriat and working class people are somehow inferior and have to change who they are in order to comply with the dictates of various professions and middle class lifeworlds (Allen, 2013).

Moreover, moving a few individuals higher up a social hierarchy is hardly tantamount to achieving social justice, and in fact distracts us from focusing on the necessary societal change that would make precariat lifeworlds, for example, more habitable and less insecure. More broadly, "The promise of mobility allows capitalist societies like the United Kingdom to maintain a system of firmly entrenched inequalities" (Reay, 2013, p. 664). The emphasis is

on encouraging individuals to overcome personal barriers to climbing social ladders, rather than building ramps to flatter structures with better access for all that might share more equitably. Additionally, as Allen and Hollingworth (2013) note, "Raising young people's aspirations without providing labour market opportunities to accommodate these is dangerous" (p. 514). Rather than a focus on the upward mobility of just a few individuals it seems more justifiable to be discussing the downward social mobility of the top 10% who control a disproportionate amount of the world's resources (Little, 2014).

To us it is unsurprising that the concept of class has not been at the forefront of mainstream psychological research and theory. To locate class as a central concept in relation to human experience involves acknowledging the role of psychology as a discipline faced with moral choices around whether or not we uphold privilege and power or work for justice and equality. As reflected in the research cited above, some psychologists are now reflecting critically on the consequences of the conservative individualistic ideology that pervades our discipline and which can perpetuate class prejudices and discrimination against vulnerable groups in society. As reflected in this special issue, psychology has more to offer than the oppressive redesign of lower class subjects to reflect middle class aspirational selves.

Contributions to the Special Issue

We would like to thank Professor Hank Stam for affording us the opportunity to compile this special issue. Thanks also to the anonymous reviewers who provided valuable feedback to the paper authors. We appreciate the hard work each author put into their respective articles. It is with sadness that we acknowledge the passing of one of the authors, Professor Peter Ambrose. Peter worked tirelessly for a number of years to document the impacts of poor housing and debt on health. He will be missed.

Promoting an economically informed and culturally orientated approach to social class in psychology has been central to our motivation for compiling this special issue. We each have different personal narratives in this respect.

I (Darrin) come from a working class family. My parents did not finish high school. My mother stayed at home and my father worked for the railways before being made redundant with the introduction of neoliberalism in the early 1980s. He subsequently experienced a decade of unemployment. I left high school at age 14 and worked in various labouring jobs until age 18 when I escaped to the regular army. The army provided a transitional space in which I was encouraged to enrol in university courses part-time. In the early 1990s the defence budget was cut, work and safety conditions deteriorated, and I left the regular army to attend university. I was fortunate to meet academics from working class backgrounds, including Professor Kerry Chamberlain (son of a drain layer), who guided me into middle class academic life. Working on this special issue has been particularly therapeutic in helping me understand my class transition and the associated anxieties and mismatched habitus. I made it some way up the social hierarchy (gaining a Queens Commission as an Army officer), whilst my sister had children early and became trapped by her gender. I remain in regular contact with family and friends who now comprise members of the precariat and whose experiences and life situations provide much of the motivation for my contributions to this special issue. My family and friends provide regular and lively commentaries on my ongoing research into urban poverty, homelessness, and health inequalities.

My (Chris) class background is less clear, I would locate my origins as on the (lower) edges of the middle class. My father left school at 14 when his father died and entered a foundry in the North-west of England before moving reluctantly into management. My mother trained as a secretary before teaching sewing and needlework in secondary schools during my childhood. My father took elocution lessons to try and lose his northern accent when I was growing up – he never quite managed it. I was the first in my family to go to university and married (too) young at 18. My husband Paul was a white working class guy from the

English Midlands who got a scholarship to study medicine at the University of Cambridge in the late 1970s. He later dropped out to start a business designing and making great hi-fi systems. By the early 1980s his business was affected by cheaper goods imported from Japan, and changes to the banking and financial system as part of an attack on the working class cash economy by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. This included very high interest rates (over 20%), our flat was almost repossessed, there were frequent visits from bailiffs, threatening phone calls from creditors, and sometimes we only just had enough money to eat - and I had a job! He was finally forced to declare personal bankruptcy in the late 1980s, which broke him. When our financial situation began to ease up by the early 1990s he had an alcohol problem that he couldn't break out of. In the end I left him because I felt that I would have gone down with him otherwise: It was one of the hardest things I have ever done. He died five years later, aged 47, his liver and kidneys pickled by booze. This first-hand experience of government economic policies designed to target working class people shaped my understanding of class relations as much as, if not more than, reading Marx and the Marienthal studies. In addition, the main focus of my current research is young people's drinking cultures and alcohol marketing via social media.

Given current global trends, including global economic crises, the increased concentration of wealth among fewer and fewer people, and renewed efforts for class analysis in psychology are timely. The time is right to bring together theory and research on social class from within psychology and to work towards an agenda for a more sustained and systematic engagement with associated issues of social stratification and related inter-group power relations. This special issue draws together contributions to current understandings of social class from a psychological perspective from a range of international contexts. This includes a psycho-social exploration of the transmission of class across generations (Walkerdine, 2015) ; a conceptual interrogation of key concepts such as Bourdieu's habitus (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015); an empirical study of classed and racialised discourse in South Africa (Barnes & Milovanovic, 2015); the parasitic operation of the debt industry in the UK (Walker et al., 2015); and a theoretical engagement with the

psychological implications of the new class terrain created by neoliberalism (Neilson, 2015). This is by no means an exhaustive review of current work on the operation of class relations from a psychological perspective.

The voluminous literature on intergenerational transmission often engages with the transmission of poverty and poor educational attainment. Valerie Walkerdine (2015) both reviews and questions the assumptions made within this literature. In particular, the paper engages with the central importance of the embodied experience of lived history and its transmission through generations, drawing on the work of psychoanalysts Davoine and Gaudilliere, Bracha Ettinger, and Felix Guattari. Walkerdine asks what it might mean to begin with the embodied experience of living class in a particular place and time, to understand both the production of affective practices, and the place in which the body of the next generation is brought, usually unknowingly, into that history? The paper draws on examples from fieldwork in two communities in South Wales as well as a study of girls growing up from the 1970s to the 90s in Britain and accounts related to genocide in an attempt to appreciate an ongoing experience of being "haunted" by earlier traumas in all spheres of life.

David Neilson (2015) brings a political economy and neo-Marxist perspective on neoliberal structural processes that generate class terrains. The first part of this contribution offers a synthetic combining of my neo-Marxist class theory with Bourdieu's theory of class habitus. From this grounding, the article considers key developments in the contemporary class structure under neoliberal global capitalism. Of particular focus is the growth of the "relative surplus population" and "precariat" that are central to everyday lived realities and a sense of insecurity. Neilson also charts how widespread anxiety and depression are arguably symptoms of deeper "ontological insecurities" arising from increased employment insecurities arising from neoliberalism that marginalizes the needs of vulnerable.

Bernhard Wagner and Ken McLaughlin (2015) consider the importance of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus and what it offers psychology in understanding the internalisation of social structures. By discussing these psychoanalytical underpinnings of

subjectivity, these authors demonstrate how habitus can be regarded as an attempt to bridge dualisms between the individual and the social. In doing so, Wagner and McLaughlin engage with issues around structural inequalities and these are reproduced at collective and personal levels. This contribution illustrates the importance of psychologists considering everyday classed practices in the reproduction of distinctions between classes and social hierarchies.

Class is also reproduced, in part, through discursive practices. Brendon R. Barnes and Minja Milovanovic (2015) focus on the psychologization of development in South Africa through a discursive analysis of a radio conversation about Mandela Day. Based on an analysis of classed talk, these authors demonstrate how difficult it is for people to make political statements within the context of powerful individualised discourses of development. This article illustrates how callers to the national radio station draw on a combination of taken-for-granted ideas about class, race, and party politics that (re)produces two discourses. The "rights discourse" highlights the importance of structural reforms and class resistance. The "agency discourse" foregrounds individualism and personal responsibility. Barnes and Milovanovic illustrate how the agency discourse works to suppress the rights discourse by appealing to dominant understandings to construct a caricature of the good citizen that is compatible with neoliberalism. The analysis of this discursive practice reveals how public social constructions can function to maintain social hierarchies and associated power relations.

The entrenchment of neoliberalism in countries such as the United Kingdom and the deregulation of financial sectors is associated with drastic increases in levels of personal debt. Carl Walker, Liz Cunningham, Paul Hanna, and Peter Ambrose (2015) explore social class issues associated with precariat encounters with the debt industry in the UK. This contribution illustrates how an engagement with societal systems, such as the debt industry, is essential in extending our knowledge of exploitative and classed relationships that are central to social hierarchies. These authors document a particularly exploitative inter-class relationship by proxy between those with money to lend and those who rely on debt to

survive, and how this reproduces the institutionalization of class in society. The concept of the predatory institution that exploit its prey (lower class groups) to the point of destruction is central to the authors' deconstruction and questioning of classed and exploitative contemporary lending practices.

Briefly, if reading this collection of articles encourages more researchers and activists to engage with a psychological approach to class, then as a group of scholars our efforts have been worthwhile. Part of any agenda for expanding work on social class in psychology needs to be challenging research and practices within psychology that ignore class or cause harm to exploited, despised, and/or marginalised groups. It is commonly assumed that the work of theorisation, empirical research, and/or practice or activism occupy separate domains. We set out to avoid this separation and blur the usual distinction between theory and empirical research. In compiling this special issue, we have been pleasantly surprised to find a broader and stronger range of psychological work on class across the world than we expected. We are also aware that this collection does not reflect the full range of psychological research on class: we see this special issue as a trigger for further debate and engagement with the dynamics of social class in the discipline. Taking a longer view, we know that some of the most important contributions to psychological understanding have come from those with an interest in understanding – and challenging – the operation of systems of inequality around class, race, and gender.

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Dr. Andrew Bengry-Howell; a project on clubbing and dance cultures as forms of social and political participation led by Dr. Sarah Riley; and a major study on the marketing of drinks in relation to young adults' everyday drinking culture. Professor Griffin has just finished a study of young adults' drinking cultures and social media use in New Zealand led by Dr. Antonia Lyons of Massey University in Wellington.

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End Notes

[i] Neoliberalism is based on a "free market" model of economics that emphasizes the coordination of economic and social life shifting from the state to private interests. Almost all domains of life in many countries have been subordinated to market rationality and opened to competition through deregulation and privatization. Emphasis is placed on individual self-reliance and the expansion of market interests through state legislative actions that promote economic liberalization. This has seen a massive increase in managerialism and bureaucracy in support of private interests to the detriment of people living in poverty (Hall, 2011).

[ii] Although this refers to a psychological concept, key texts on behavioural nudging have been produced by economists (e.g., Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).