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Chapter 5: Classed Identities: Submergence, Authenticity and Resistance

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Chapter 5: Classed Identities: Submergence, Authenticity and Resistance

Bridgette Rickett

Introduction

This chapter will, first, review social psychological and sociological work that has sought to unpick how culturally shared ideology produces classed identities to discriminate and minimise the space for collective, class-based resistance. Second, empirical research will be reviewed that highlights instances of working-class people negotiating more positive identity positions for themselves and each other in a variety of everyday contexts and settings (e.g. families, education, occupational and leisure) and in relation to several issues (e.g. foodwork and parenting).

To achieve these aims, the chapter is organised around four main themes. The first theme explores how class prejudice can arise from the ways in which we engage with socially produced patterns of meaning around social class. In addition, this theme will consider how these ways constitute our sense of ourselves and others in relation to the worlds we live in. A second theme captures research findings that illuminate how explicit discourse in relation to social class is often unavailable or avoided, leaving it discussed in indirect and highly coded ways. Third, we will explore some recent empirical research that has elucidated how such socially produced classism can build an emotional realm where we strive to see ourselves and others in ways that release us from the pain and anguish often associated with classism. Fourth, we consider empirical literature which highlights instances of working-class people negotiating more positive identity positions for themselves and each other. This is structured around two sub-themes; femininities and masculinities. Both of these are directed via a keen interest in how gendered and classed (and often raced) identity work can conjure up emancipatory opportunities for discursive resistance to unequal classed relations and stigmatising identities. Finally, we will focus on the challenges that have arisen from our four themes before summing up.

Classification, social identities and class prejudice

As discussed in previous chapters, a body of critical social psychological work on social class has afforded a central role to language and discourse (e.g. Holt & Griffin, 2005; Phoenix & Tizard, 1996; Willott & Griffin, 1999). These studies are important in highlighting the role of discourse in the justification of social structures based on class difference. In addition, arguably this work also builds upon early Marxist literature on the role of 'dominant bourgeois ideology' and how this serves to obscure exploitation and injustice in capitalist societies (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1978), excluding the possibility of social change (see Gramsci, 1971).

Crucially, this empirical scholarship provides us with important accounts of stigmatisation of the working-class via the analysis of dominant discourse that emanates from politics, government policy and the media (see chapter 4). However, outside of the scope of this research are answers as to how such discourses are represented and mobilised in relation to selfhood, and the understanding of others. In order to produce such key knowledge, some critical social psychological and sociological studies have examined how people's talk Others working-class communities via the deployment of prevailing discourse.

A good example to begin with is the late 20th century social psychological work by Phoenix and Tizard (1996). This research involved interviews with young Londoners (aged 14-18) of different genders and from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. A main finding was that middle-class participants often drew upon figures from popular culture such as TV shows (see previous chapter) who they believed typified working-class lifestyles. Using such figures, working-class lifestyles were derided, and working-class people positioned as inferior. We argue that these earlier accounts demonstrate the impact of class 'stereotypes' identified in popular culture by those such as Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) and Tyler (2008) can and do have an impact on everyday understandings and class relations.

More recent research by Valentine and Harris, carried out more than two decades later (2014), sought to investigate how people talk about and define certain (classed) groups, with a particular aim to seek to understand how these groups are positioned as being less or more worthy than one's own. This focus, the authors argue, enables a consideration of the production of power differentials that can result in wider social consequences. In terms of

methodology, the researchers interviewed 30 participants from diverse social backgrounds, ethnicities, genders and (dis)abilities, across multiple communities in Leeds, UK. During these interviews, the authors found that the cultural representation of the 'chav' saturated the way in which the participants talked about working-class people. As presented in Chapter 4, the cultural trope of the 'chav' was the media buzzword of the year in the UK in 2004 (Jensen & Ringrose, 2014), became synonymous with the British 'underclass' (see chapter 1), and more specifically, with the indigenous White poor within contemporary British society. Interestingly, in Valentine and Harris' research, despite the character of the 'chav' being talked about as not being associated with social class, it was consistently called upon as a class signifier. Here, the working-class were presented as deficient, irrational, feckless and worthy of disgust, particularly women, while working-class men were more likely to be depicted as aggressive, lacking impulse control and prone to risk-taking and criminal activities. As noted in previous chapters, this is nothing new, indeed these stereotypes reproduce prevailing discourse, such as the working-class as inherently deficient, irrational and out of control, in our media (see Chapter 4) and in the production of scientific understandings of social class (see Chapter 2). As argued in chapter 4, this additional differentiation across both gendered, classed and raced lines has dominated media and popular culture (e.g. Tyler, 2013).

Additionally, important research from applied psychologists, has gone on to investigate how language used both reflects socially shared values around social class and drives social exclusion in education settings. For example, Cleland and Palma (2018) examined the institutional discourse deployed by senior leadership in medical schools. Again, language used reinforced culturally-located classed stereotypes about 'us' and 'them', even when initiatives to achieve diversity and equality dominated in medical education. As with previously presented research, discursive tropes drawn on often radiated from both dominant scientific classist research and the media, such as working-class, as, by default; uncivilised, irrational therefore unstable and unsuitable for admission. The data revealed that assumed classed differences derived from the economic background of applicants and/or their families were drawn on to conclude inherent, 'fixed' characteristics that reinforce a classed ideology of difference.

As Valentine and Harris (2014) have persuasively argued, such findings illustrate that judgements are moralising, produced from cultural ideologies, and they matter because they justify contemporary social exclusion (e.g. who should be allowed to go where and when). Importantly, often these portrayals are utilised by working-class participants about their own communities, which, in turn, they sought to Other themselves from by using narratives that hold people responsible rather than social, economic and political conditions. Therefore, disadvantage is reconfigured as an individual problem emanating from the morally and economically worthless poor.

In general, in this body of research, the participants often distinguish between 'us' and 'them' based on commodities, practices and lifestyles that have strong class connotations (e.g. housing, dress, behaviour and economic resources). While most of the participants lacked familiarity with people from other social class groups, therefore class relations were largely imagined rather than 'lived'. As argued by Walkerdine (1995), such constructions of working-class people probably reveal more about the 'middle-class imagination' with its fears and desires than they do about what working-class people are actually like. For example, on first reading, seemingly positive culturally situated identities are drawn on to cast working-class people and their communities as something to desire. However, as Lawler (2005) argued, in popular media and everyday lives, this outsider gaze is both repeatedly turned on working-class people and is motivated by fascination. These two features lead to a production of "horrific and mystifying others" (pg. 432). This theorising has gained some traction in empirical research. For example, in Holt and Griffin (2005)'s research, they described how the class prejudice identified in their UK based research with students was also shot through with an ambivalent desire for the exotic working-class Other (e.g. more sociable) and certain aspects of working-class culture were considered more 'authentic' than middle-class lives and spaces (e.g. 'authentic' working-class pubs versus corporate chain bars) which the authors argued was similar to tourists finding 'authentic' places on holiday. While recent research by the social geographer Hoekstra (2019) used interviews with a diverse sample of local 'professional' residents in three Amsterdam neighbourhoods. In this interview data they identified an inclination by the participants to draw on discourse that conjured up orientalist imaginings of the exotic Other and the spaces they inhabit, and these were interlaced with narratives that argued for a profound need for

the participants to distance themselves from the same (exotic) neighbourhood and its 'dangerous' diversity.

In sum, the empirical work presented in this section provides nuanced and sophisticated accounts of social identities and social relations and the important role that social class plays in these to disparage the working-class into an exotic, yet unworthy and dangerous Other.

Reconstructing class: The ideal of 'classlessness'

In this second theme we carry on our review and analysis of classed identities and relations, by turning to the way in which explicit discourse in relation to social class is often limited, unavailable or avoided, leaving it frequently discussed in indirect and highly coded ways. This absence or, at the most, opaqueness, leaves social class identities often difficult to claim and prevailing social class discrimination difficult to name as socially produced classism. For example, we will look at why referring to class has become somewhat taboo in societies. In addition, we will examine, using published empirical research, how an ideal of 'classlessness' and its sibling 'class-blindness' is promoted through prevailing neo-liberal discourses around a shared humanity, meritocracy, individual choice and the fluidity of class. Last, we explore how, within these frameworks, 'working-class problems' (e.g. lack of social mobility) are often individualised and construed as fixed while ideologies about responsibilities and choice impact on us all to mask social and structural inequalities that radically shape those choices.

A review of research illustrates that vague and subtly signalled language around social class appears to be widespread in western societies and has continued to be so for several decades. For example, research by Phoenix and Tizard (1996) found that when they conducted interviews with young Londoners in order to explore the place of social class in their lives, most of the participants were vague about what class meant and which class group they belonged to. This led the authors to propose that the participants had restricted access to a discourse of class as a result of attempts by powerful groups to 'dissolve' notions of a society stratified along class lines. Indeed, as Holt and Griffin's (2005) later research found, class was often referred to by participants in their study in highly coded ways. Although not referring to class explicitly, participants used terms in reference to groups of

people and places that were clearly understood as being 'classed' and it was assumed that others had a shared understanding of this. One example was referring to people as 'Kevs, Trevs, Sharons and Tracys', 'locals' or 'townies' which were terms used to refer to working-class men and women. Holt and Griffin (2005) argue this is because talking about class and categorising people according to class is taboo in British culture; instead an ideal of 'classlessness' prevails (Bradley, 1996; see chapter one). Therefore, coded terms reflect the elusiveness of class when discourses around classlessness dominate. Pertinently, Holt and Griffin also found that the working-class participants were less likely to articulate a conscious identity position with regards to social class than the middle-class participants (see also Gorz, 1982); for instance, they were more likely to report that they did not know which social class they belonged to or what was meant by social class. While, if they did identify as belonging to a certain class, there was a general tendency for the participants to describe themselves as 'middle-class', a propensity, particularly amongst white people, that is well-documented (see Bullock & Limbert, 2009; see chapter one).

In Cleland and Palma's more recent work (2018), a key finding is that senior leadership teams in Medical School, again, differentiated between social class groups using subtle linguistic signalling. For example, working-class applicants were referred to as 'WP' (widening participation) while middle-class students were prominently referred to as 'our students'. The authors argue persuasively that it is these kinds of vague referrals that allowed for a subtly classed Othering, enabling coded classed messaging while ensuring that responsibility for such hierarchical class-based discrimination was either denied or unacknowledged.

Therefore, this body of work importantly highlights how limited or coded discourse around social class justifies class hierarchies and makes identities fraught or difficult, particularly for working-class and/or people of colour.

As previously argued, an important feature in the invisibilising social class inequities and classed identities, is the saturation of neo-liberalist notions of shared humanness, meritocracy and individual responsibility to justify class (and raced) privilege or indeed the lack of it. Enlightening work by social psychologists Thomas and Azmitia's (2014) used a mixed methods approach to illustrate the importance of meanings around social class in 104

U.S. young adults who were attending a state university in northern California. A first finding from this research was that 'upper-class' students often justified their privilege by reference to their parents' hard work. For example, the authors share a story told by an Asian-American upper-class woman about how she felt harshly and publicly criticised when a peer drew attention to her unique class privilege of which the peer didn't have the benefit. In this story the participant talked about how guilty that made her feel, and that it wasn't her fault she was privileged. This talk was common in data from participants from middle and upper-class backgrounds and was often shored up by discursive social-class distancing to avoid the associated responsibility for class status which, in turn, was validated as earned through (parental) hard work and merit therefore not to be ashamed of. These narratives produce a clear discourse of shame for those whose parents were assumed to not have worked hard enough (see next section) while justifying social structures and the power associated with them as 'earned'.

An additional finding in Thomas and Azmitia's (2014) research was that examples of classed divisions raised by working-class peers (e.g. stress, or a lack of, around financial difficulties) were denied by middle-class students. Instead, the (middle and upper-class) participants drew on a 'shared humanity' discourse to establish humanity as the final leveller, the world as classless and them as 'class-blind'. Here then, claiming social class identities is avoided or denied and this is achieved by positioning class as unimportant in the face of more powerful forces that did not discriminate on classed lines. Again, despite attempts by working-class students to raise classed inequalities, this discourse was drawn upon across class boundaries, and was commonly evoked by working-class participants of colour to minimise hierarchical class difference and the moral (un) worthiness associated with it. For example, a working-class Asian American woman said:

"Basically everybody's about the same social class that I am, so I don't see how it really affects anybody....We're all equal, I mean, nobody should think they're better than others."
(pg. 207)

The authors theorised that this way of talking about social class is a means to present college life and its inhabitants as 'class blind' and so impervious to the impact of classed inequalities and the resultant stigmatising identities. In addition, it was clear in this

published data that if a classed identity was claimed, this was positioned as a matter of personal choice. We argue that key points from important critical race scholarship (e.g. Wise, 2010) about 'colour blindness' can be helpful here too. Colour blindness and class blindness are shored up by differing patterns of oppressive systems of control and are often dangerously positioned as competing (e.g. 'it is not about race it is about class'). However, they can often be "bedfellows" in that as they both take the form of neo-liberalism (Aramburu, 2020) and are weaponised by promote individualism, through the meritocratic and personal choice discourses that seep down into our everyday lives. This ideology of 'class blindness', while seemingly emancipatory through the reiteration of the discourse of a classless society, anchors the idea that class does not matter even when it blatantly does (Smith & Redington, 2010). In addition, as Cook and O'Hara (2019) argue, it also allows the middle-class to view their selves and their lives as earned and without reference to continued unfair, classed division and difference.

In contrast to this prevalent construction of the classless society promoted in 'class blindness', these important examples of research continue to draw attention to late capitalist ideology around what is theorised as the 'fluidity of class'. This includes a portrayal of the class system and those in it as existing without boundaries, where hard work and merit, as with Thomas and Azmitia's work (2014), achieve social mobility. The fluidity of class is also tended to be understood along linear and unidimensional lines where working-class peoples, while being painfully conscious of their classed identities and the inequalities bestowed upon them, see upwards social mobility as a way to escape some of these inequalities along with their stigmatised working-class identity. Therefore, in this context classed identities are fluid, the class system is one without boundaries, as such, the working-class and poor are simply required to use drive, ambition and hard work to gain access to middle-class privileges by virtue of this individualised merit. This discourse echoes historical and prevailing scientific discourse around intelligence and social mobility presented in chapter 2.

For instance, research by Schwartz, Donovan, and Guido-DeBrito (2009) found a reproduction of the discourse of meritocracy in college student men's talk about their futures, where education and hard work were referred to as something that would allow them to achieve social mobility in a fluid, unidimensional classed system. Here, students

were very much conscious of their social class in relation to others and unfair limitations that posed and saw personal characteristics such as the way people spoke, dressed (middle-class) as signifiers of class. The researchers reported stories of how some of the students used these signifiers to imitate middle-classness so they could pass as middle-class and therefore reach career goals. As Bullock and Limbert (2003) similarly report, while most of the low income women they interviewed strongly identified with being working-class, they also imagined, as a result of the merit of their hard work and 'drive to success', that they would become middle-class and none of them expected to still be working-class or identify as such in these imagined futures.

To be clear, we are not presenting a simplistic idea that ascribing to the discourse of a meritocratic fluid class system creates a socially mobile self. This process is complicated, and fraught with structural and social barriers where bourgeoisie, white supremacy and patriarchy collude to ensure that classed, gendered and raced identities stick and Other to create a profound lack of belonging (Rickett & Morris, forthcoming). For example, in Farina's (2020) research, a case study focus presents a moving account of a Latino woman aiming to become a professional. In aiming to do so, she acknowledges that gaining access to this world requires association with her "oppressor" (pg. 70) and despite resigning herself to 'necessary' plans to slowly erase her working-class Latino identity to embody white, middle-class identity signifiers, she would be at risk of continuing to be devalued.

Therefore, this last body of research that identifies discourses of a fluid class system and the fluid self very much illustrates that for some, there is a firm understanding of unjust treatment and limited opportunities for working-class people. However, despite this cognisance, individualist discourses, often constructed by the dominant and most privileged in society to justify their own success, are being actively co-opted (along with other individual class markers) by working-class communities with an aim to be socially mobile enough to 'escape' such injustices. This construction here is less of a 'classless society' but of an acknowledged social hierarchy that is only inclusive to those who work hard, have the aspirations to merit inclusion and whose individualistic characteristics 'fit'. At the same time, recent reports juxtapose a brutal reality that "Britain's deep social mobility problem, for this generation of young people in particular, is getting worse not better" (p.g. 5, Social Mobility Commission, 2017). As such, here it is argued that these constructions of the fluid

self and the unidimensional, socially mobile society may also ensure that we deny inequalities as stemming from a structural and social level by using neoliberal notions of individualism and choice, despite the abject lack of social mobility for most working-class people.

Finally, part of this 'striving' for working-class people is about both being understood to be worthy of such elevated social status (Valentine and Harris, 2014) and seeking to avoid the heavily stigmatised working-class 'skiver' identity. Therefore, in this individualising and subjugating discursive terrain, it is unlikely that people will mobilise to challenge such collective class-based inequalities (Jay, Muldoon & Howarth, 2018). While others may be very much motivated to distance themselves from 'toxic' working-class identities (Skeggs, 1997). Consequently, as Jay Muldoon and Howarth (2018) argue, inequalities are hidden and there is a lack of positive discourse about the working-class, while the (white) middle-class both seek claims to that identity, and, strive to deny its impact through a paradoxical reproduction of the classless society. This means that the economically advantaged do not critically evaluate or even acknowledge their privileged position and the economically disadvantaged are effectively silenced (Sanders & Mahalingam, 2012).

'Submerged identities in an emotional terrain'

As bell hooks once wrote, "no one wants to talk about class. It is not sexy or cute." (hooks, 2012, p.g. 7).

In the previous two themes we have argued that the discursive landscape in contemporary Western societies may have resulted in social class being discursively camouflaged into what Bradley (1996) referred to as a 'submerged identity'. Therefore, identification with a social class group, in particular, the working-class, is elusive, something to be avoided, or something that is temporary in the journey towards a middle-class identity. However, as Black middle-class writers such as Jenkins (2019) argue, the White middle-class bourgeois ideology reiterates white supremacist practices, therefore identifying as middle-class for people of colour is often fraught and elusive since membership of the (White) middle-class feels perpetually liminal through the production of profound experiences of shame, unbelonging and unworthiness. In addition, as previously argued, politicised ideology has meant that classed identities have been made more difficult and, in some cases,

embarrassing or anxiety-provoking and so may be avoided altogether for many (e.g. Holt & Griffin, 2005).

Interestingly, the startling paucity of research on class within psychology has led many authors to conclude that one additional reason for such an important omission of thought on the subject, as Sayer (2005, p. 1) has argued, represents the societal level milieu where “class is an embarrassing and unsettling subject”.

Holt and Griffin’s (2005) research also reported that talk around class was often accompanied by nervous laughter or an apology, perhaps indicative of acute embarrassment. This emotional realm that is produced through social meanings around class has been discussed in more recent research. For example, Crozier, Burke and Archer (2016) found in their higher education student research that, while not the same as the reluctance to discuss race that saturated their data, there was also a sort of squeamish unwillingness to discuss class. While Glodjo (2017) found embarrassment and taboos surrounding open discussion on social class, coupled with a dominance of middle-class norms, prevented economically privileged persons from critically reflecting on their class identity and how it might impact on social relations. These processes, Glogjo argued, reinforce dominant societal ideologies that shame, marginalize and silence working-class people. Instructively, hooks (2009) reflects on her own experience of the emotional realm of class:

“Demands that individuals from class backgrounds deemed undesirable surrender all vestiges of their past create psychic turmoil. We were encouraged, as many students are today, to betray our class origins” (p. 182).

Sociological studies similarly suggest that being marked as or identifying as a member of the working-class engenders feelings of shame and guilt (Reay, 2005; Sayer, 2005; Skeggs, 1997). For example, among a group of women interviewed in earlier work by Nenga (2003), those from working-class backgrounds remembered the shame and anxiety they experienced in situations where their clothing or food was discursively marked as violating middle-class norms perpetuated in popular culture. In addition, they argued that this production of shame silenced them from raising the injustice of such stigmatising normative

comparisons. Importantly, this shaming was so Othering that it often also signified a threat to social bonds and created trouble for friendships and wider relationships (Scheff, 2003).

Following these arguments and a turn to emotion in research and theory, researchers such as Kallschmidt and Eaton (2019) have investigated how such shame, stigma and embarrassment is both created and reproduced in work settings. The argument they present is that this leaves the stigmatised to engage in emotionally fraught identity management of the self and their practices in order to survive. As previously argued, people manage identities invisibilised through taboos in different ways and for different reasons. In this research, twenty working-class white men in the USA revealed that they often concealed their class not just because of fears of class discrimination, but that it was felt to be deeply emotional and personal or that they feared feeling ashamed as a result of the ensuing pity and condescension inferred from classist moral positioning. Of course, as argued earlier, concealment is also both a survival strategy and a means to gain the privilege associated with middle-classness and this is often drawn on gendered, raced as well as classed lines. For example, the authors also argue that concealment allowed these men to maintain a raced and gendered privilege that comes from conforming with hegemonic masculinity. However, these research findings further reiterate the argument that strongly identifying as working-class can create social stigma and related emotional pain and anguish which can only be partially side-stepped via concealment.

To sum up, this marked, and socially forced decline of 'class consciousness' in the Western world (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015) should concern Marxists who believe that this is a prerequisite for class conflict and collective political action on the part of the working-class (e.g. Marx, 1970), or at the very least a questioning of what is often 'passed off' as the natural order of things (Bourdieu & Ferguson, 1999).

Finally, these findings cannot be adequately theorised by employing more mainstream social psychological approaches to identity such as Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; 1981) (for more extended discussions of the limitations of Social Identity Theory in theorising social class, see Argyle, 1994; Day, et al, 2014; Holt & Griffin, 2005). In addition, the process of Othering, apparent in aforementioned research, is a means by which people consolidate and assert a sense of valued identity, for example, one more individual,

educated, sophisticated, cultured etc. than the working-class Other. On the surface, this may appear to be a finding that could be explained by drawing upon Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978), whereby the 'out-group' (the working-class) is being portrayed in ways that bolster the self-esteem of members of the in-group (the middle-class). However, Holt and Griffin (2005) pointed out that their participants' talk around class was also imbued with ambivalence and that there was evidence in the data of desire for the working-class Other, a finding that cannot be adequately accommodated by Social Identity Theory. Furthermore, as Walkerdine's early work (1995) argues, this process of Othering is instructive, not just for revealing how identities are constructed, negotiated and consolidated but also because of what this reveals about the anxieties of the middle-class imagination.

Implications for transformative politics: Authenticity, resistance and social protest

The previous three themes within research have presented a disheartening account of largely negative discursive constructions of the working-class (e.g. in the psychological literature, media and everyday talk). However, we would now like to present critical social psychological and sociological literature which highlights that despite prevailing classist discourse, there is evidence of working-class people resisting and negotiating more positive identity positions for themselves and each other in a variety of everyday contexts and settings. This literature will be the focus of the remaining part of this chapter. Following this, and the main gendered focus within that literature, we will organise our arguments around classed intersections with gender (and race).

To begin with, it is worthwhile looking at how the possibilities of resistance have been theorised in critical social psychological work. Scholars, particularly feminists, have long sought to understand the constraining and oppressive functions of, for example, gendered roles and constructions (e.g. Millett, 1971; Wetherell, 1995). However, early critics have pointed out that such explanations can fall foul of determinism that obscures notions of agency (e.g. Madill & Doherty, 1994). Despite these critiques, as will be presented, critical social psychological work has been drawn upon to explore agency within various sites. Here writers argue that the (classed) subject can reflect upon the discourses and discursive relations that constitute them and that they have some leeway in choosing from the options available (e.g. Day, et al. 2010). Further to this, it has been suggested that we have the potential to 'rewrite' ideologies of class by subverting dominant discourses through the

mobilization of 'alternative' or counter discourses that position working-class people in more powerful ways (e.g. Day, Gough & McFadden, 2003). Such discourses could provide the potential to liberate classed subjects from constraining classed ideals by offering counter-discourses (e.g. Loveday, 2015), by parodying middle-class ideals (e.g. Rickett & Morris, forthcoming), and by offering positions in multiple and competing discourses (e.g. Woolhouse et al., 2019). Here then discourse becomes a crucial site for active resistance to class ideologies, which in turn opens possibilities for positive action and social change.

Secondly, as discussed in chapter 3, there is a long tradition within sociology and critical social psychology of examining how socially positioned language and discourse serves to constitute both social class and gender identities. Following Crenshaw (1989), a strand of research has theorised class and gender (and often race) by adhering to an understanding of intersectionality that coincides with post-structuralist argument (Butler, 1999), and follows Foucauldian understandings of power (see Knudsen, 2007). This work tends to focus on how social categories articulate with one another, particularly on how class is gendered and often raced. Here, the exploration of intersections of class and gender is through the deconstruction of multi-layered meaning around identities that are conceived to be multiple, shifting and often contradictory.

It is broadly within these two theoretical frameworks that the following body of research has sought to understand how social class coincides with femininities and masculinities to create pockets of resistance to classed and gendered norms.

Working-class feminine identities, authenticity, resistance and social protest

As identified earlier, feminist scholars have a solid history of theorising and researching intersections between social class and femininities in ways that create opportunities for agency and resistance to unfair classed and gendered normative ideals.

One theme detected in the literature is the resistance of working-class girls and women towards dominant, bourgeois ideals of femininity as conformist, passive and frail (e.g. Skeggs, 1997). In addition, critical work in the field of organisational psychology has found that working-class women employed in occupations traditionally associated with men and

masculinity (e.g. door supervision and police-work) reject constructions of the 'ideal female worker' (as safe, risk-averse and 'ladylike') as inconducive to the kind of (physical, often violent) work that they do (e.g. Rickett, 2014; Rickett & Roman, 2013). In contrast, participants often discursively positioned themselves as courageous, wily women who were afraid in the face of violence (Rickett, 2014).

While a second broad theme focusses on claims to authenticity and legitimacy which are often central to the formation of social relations in working-class women (e.g. taking a no-nonsense approach to foodwork; Woolhouse et al, 2019). As we have previously argued, challenges surrounding identity and authenticity are sharply felt by those who identify with or are marked as a marginalised person, especially those that may be socially or culturally stigmatized such as working-class people. As such, as we will argue, for many, powerful authentic working-class identities need to be negotiated and recognised as such within the wider sense making of working-class people and their communities.

At the turn of the millennium, feminist research by Day et al. (2003) reported that the working-class women in their study, which examined talk around class and gender in the context of leisure and 'nights out', positioned themselves as women who were tough, clued-up and 'could look after themselves'. The authors also found that the women used this kind of talk to produce an authentic identity within the night-time economy, while simultaneously othering themselves from middle-class women who were ridiculed for being pretentious and inauthentic.

A decade or so later, Rickett and Roman (2013) applied such findings to the organisational contest of UK Door supervision work. This work is traditionally seen as a working-class, masculinised line of work. In addition, it is deemed to be one that is physically risky, where violence is seen as a 'tool of the trade' and where 'bodily capital' and 'fighting ability' are paramount to the competent performance of the job. The study involved in-depth interviews with under 35-years-old, White, British, heterosexual women who worked as door supervisors in the UK. One analytic focus was on the way in which oppressive discursive constructions of working-class women's identities were reworked and resisted through an intersection of class, gender and race. For example, the participants often claimed a White, working-class 'hard matriarch' identity that actively resisted classed and

racial ideology that controls working-class women's identities and practices. For the participants, the ability of women to enact violence allowed for the re-writing of the passive woman and a non-conformist 'hard matriarch' identity demanded status and respect amongst working-class male colleagues and, often middle-class, customers. For example, 'Angela' represents herself as a maternal subject, while the middle-class male customer is drawn in relation to this as an infantilized subject achieved through a maternalised discourse of caring, responsibility and duty. However, rather than a simple reproduction of notions of mothering, the discourse is reconstructed to undermine White bourgeois and patriarchal structures of power. Historically, working-class women have had narrow options for potential employment, ranging from motherhood to being in a caring profession or service (Taylor, 2012), while, in recent history, other types of work they have carried out has had an inherent demand for emotional labour. Therefore, it may be difficult for working-class women to position themselves as successful women when their work sits so far outside of these understandings. The authors argue that by re-writing normative ideology around the maternalised working-class woman, in the guise of the 'hard matriarch', participants presented themselves in a higher status position and as disrupting ideals that may otherwise undermine them. By parodying masculinity and using the re-written maternal discourse to infantilise, the power positioning of middle-class male customers is subverted. However, the authors also urge caution, noting how such authentic representations of the matriarchal woman not only essentializes womanhood, it can also serve to deny women an active sexuality, particularly for white working-class women (see also Skeggs', early work, 1991; 1997).

Current research by Rickett and Morris (forthcoming) explores how working-class academic women find authenticity and value in the elitist and masculinised contemporary UK Higher Education setting. To this end, 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of self-identified, working-class women academics working in the UK. This research followed previous work that revealed that working-class women's academic lives are littered with classism and sexism (Langhout, Drake & Rosselli, 2009), while different processes of social segregation enable persistent devaluing and, sometimes, disregard (e.g. Reay, 2004), and bodies and practices are policed and regulated to fit masculinised, middle-class norms (e.g. Raisborough & Adams, 2008). Importantly for the purpose of the current focus, the authors

identified resistant discourse around emotional labour that presented working-class women's embodied cultural capital as producing superior skills (than their middle-class counterparts) in delivering student support. This discourse around work created potential space for empowerment, a sense of belonging and, arguably, resistance that claimed back authentic selfhood within UK Higher Education.

For example, 'Ellie' centres her class as "more important (than being a woman or LGB) weirdly" (pg. 9) in determining whether she can be a worthy, highly valued citizen in this 'modern' HE context. Here then working-class (and gendered) associated 'skills' are presented as valuable for the demands of the time as they symbolise modernity and progress. While 'Maddie' agrees that her working-class derived social and emotional capital ensures students see her as more 'approachable' and more 'down to earth' than her middle-class colleagues. In turn, middle-class colleagues were explicitly drawn as old-fashioned, unworldly and lacking the emotional resilience to deliver student support. For example, 'Gina' caricatures a colleague getting visibly emotional, presenting this to be both unwarranted and caused by emotional fragility seen to be typical of her unworldly, middle-class background.

"My colleague ... started getting really upset about something she was talking about and ...erm but she started nearly crying and getting really upset and I said why are you crying and getting upset about this ... she has a very different background to me so she would of come up through the whole sort of Oxbridge kind of route." (pg. 6)

In a second research context, research by Woolhouse, et al. (2012) explored food and eating in their study with working-class, teenage girls attending schools in the South Yorkshire area of the UK. In doing so, they found that many culturally sanctioned practices around food consumption (e.g. 'healthy eating') and concerns with appearance and body image, were derided as something that 'posh women' do and invest in. In and identified discourse around 'everything in moderation', the girls positioned themselves instead as more "sensible" (pg. 52) and down-to-earth. Similarly, in an ethnographic study on a US university campus, Armstrong et al. (2014) also found that women students from working-class backgrounds often construed those who were more privileged as pretentious, elitist and engaged in excessive consumption. This is interpreted by the authors as an attempt on the

part of those with limited resources to try to avenge class injuries caused by damaging ideology. For instance, research (e.g. Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991) has demonstrated vividly how discursive constructions of the maternal subject often serve to privilege and therefore normalise white, middle-class women and, in turn, Other and derogate women considered to be working-class. In addition, this Othering shores up political, social and economic inequities through the denial of social housing, medical and social-care policy and practice and a pervasive derogation of them, their bodies and their lives (Weber, 1998). Thereby in this socially-located context, young working-class women are utilising discursive practices of survival to parody and resist bourgeois and sexist ideology to claim authentic, reasonable and balanced identities around food and their bodies.

Much more recent work pursued these findings further to explore motherhood and cultural ideals around food preparation. In this interview research (Woolhouse et al., 2019) working-class mothers pointed to the unattainable and 'classed' ideals that are set by cultural expectations of 'cooking from scratch'. In addition, some of the mothers attempted to challenge this cultural expectation through: questioning the value of freshly prepared food cooked by a mother, emphasising the difficulties presented by the conflicting demands of employment outside the home and carrying out family and domestic activities, and suggesting that such expectations can be unrealistic and place mothers under significant pressure. Such counter discourse was more evident from the working-class mothers who articulated a more pragmatic and 'no-nonsense' approach to family foodwork (see also Wright et al., 2015). For example, 'Asha', a working-class married mother of two who described herself as 'Arab', provided an account of mealtimes in her household which are staggered due to shift work and can result in the need for three cooked meals per night, therefore takeaways can be a convenient and pragmatic choice. While 'Diane' constructs the expectations placed on women (as represented in TV cookery programmes) as anger provoking ("they piss me off", pg. 292) and completely unrealistic for many women ("who's...got all day to stand baking ...cooking... marinating something for seventy-five hours", pg. 292). Diane contrasts the lives of mothers who are employed outside the home with those such as 'Nigella Lawson' (a British 'celebrity' cook) whom she depicts as 'posh' and doesn't have to work, suggesting that the domestic and cooking activities promoted by those such as Nigella Lawson are completely unrealistic for employed and/or single mothers

and place unfair expectations on them. These findings follow Wright et al., (2015) and Wills et al.'s (2011) research which found that working-class mothers' experiences of surveillance and expectation were often construed as externally imposed (e.g. by health professionals). Similarly, here, Diane is explicitly challenging media messages/pressures, exposing and challenging the classed nature of hegemonic discourse around femininity and motherhood through which prescriptions for 'good/normal' mothering are built upon the values and social and economic circumstances associated with (white and married) middle-class mothers (Elliott et al., 2015).

Last, we will focus on research that samples working-class young women and girls in educational settings where White, middle-class discourses prevail. Researchers, particularly US based academics, have asked how working-class girls and women can resolve tension between working-class discourses and the middle-class discourses around schooling and scholarliness. A first example is a longitudinal research study (Hicks, 2004) that uses an ethnographic approach to explore how young, white, working-class Appalachian girls resist dominant ideologies by rejecting middle-class scholarliness as dull, and consciously cultivated. In direct opposition to these, they claimed subversive and joyous learning identities. In this research Hicks highlights the girls' passionate interest in horror fiction and their desires to write about the outlandish and monstrous, which conflicts with the "highbrow texts held in favour by reading educators" (pg. 222). In the identity struggles to "negotiate the contradiction entailed by living in one social class domain and being educated in another," (Hicks 2004, pg. 228) the girls engaged in loud conversations, swore and used sexual innuendos to subvert and parody the disciplinary power of middle-class discourse around both femininities and scholarliness.

Following this, further work by Crumb et al (2019) examined how Black, working-class women who are studying for their PhDs manage to carve out positive identities for themselves in hostile terrain where elitist, masculinist and White values dominate. This research follows Ostrove et al's (2011) findings that despite commonly shared interests and backgrounds with other Black women in these learning communities, classism is rife and Black working-class women often feel a profound lack of belonging as a result of their classed identities as Black women. Research such as that by hook (2000) has also found that Black, working-class women are often overwhelmed with the triple layer of educationally

situated inequalities, are seen to lack the cultural capital required and are often at the wrong end of racist and classist practice. Despite this, one way that the participants in this study forged positive identities was to call upon authentic working-class virtues, such as a built-in capacity for hard work, which they argued was instilled in childhood and helped them to meet the complex and conflicting demands of doctoral studies in a way that their middle-class counterparts were unable to. In addition, like the working-class women academics in Rickett and Morris' (2020) research, they drew on narratives that wrote life experiences and adversity as a determinant of a resilient self, as such, positioned themselves as both more worldly and more geared up for academic life than peers. While these points of resistance may appear implicit compared to some of the bold, explicit counter discourse examples in Hick's 2004 research, within this triple layering of discrimination and Othering they could be read as remarkable survival strategies to preserve a worthy and capable sense of themselves in relation to others.

In sum, the research we have presented on working-class feminine identities, authenticity, resistance and social protest we argue that across multiple contexts, resistant identities and protest can take many forms to contest, or actively resist classist, sexist and racist ideology. In doing, positive, genuine, legitimate, and worthy identities are claimed, and potentially subjugating power differentials are challenged.

Working-class masculine identities, authenticity, resistance and social protest

Finally, we will look at examples of research that have explored working-class masculine identities, resistance and protest. In early research, reflecting social concerns of the time, leisure and alcohol-consumption were a common context for investigation. For example, research found that collective episodic drinking (particularly at weekends) provides opportunities for social bonding, camaraderie and the construction and validation of valued masculine identities (e.g. as 'tough') (e.g. Burns, 1980; Canaan, 1996). Such authors point out that other, more socially sanctioned means of validating masculinity, such as via material possessions or employment that indicates social status, are often blocked or unavailable to such men and as a result, they have sought other means. Further than this, those such as Tomsen (1997) have argued that heavy drinking and fighting on the part of working-class men can be read as a rejection of socially dominant, middle-class practices

and values (e.g. respectability and restraint), which he characterises as a form of 'social protest'.

A second focus in this early research was how the high levels of unemployment amongst working-class men effected how they saw themselves. For example, Willott and Griffin (1997) conducted group interviews with a group of working-class men in the West Midlands in the UK who were experiencing long-term unemployment and as such, could be regarded as a group lacking social and economic power. Despite this, the authors found that the men carved out positive identity positions for themselves as men who were still able to provide for their families (despite their unemployed status) and as men still engaged in public consumption.

Following more contemporary concerns, recent work on masculinities and class has been more interested in exploring how working-class boys understand themselves and/or are understood in educational settings. While a growing body of research explores points of resistance and positive identity reclamation for working-class fathers. Within this research we also see themes around the authentic self as a means of resistance to disempowering dominant discourse.

For context, compared to other ethnic groups, White British students attending State Schools score marginally below the average on school attainment at 16 years old, in the UK (Gov.uk, 2019) but are several times more likely to enter higher education than their peers of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds (Mulcahy et al. 2017). However, a small subset of these students, specifically boys whose families are in receipt of free school meals (roughly 1 in 20 of white British children; Crawford, 2019) perform the lowest of all ethnic groups at attainment at the age of 16 (Gov.uk, 2019). Within this context personal aspiration has been identified by some research to partially explain why working-class White boys don't perform as well as other ethnic groups such as boys from British Chinese families. This focus reflects contemporary neoliberal values around 'success' which can jar with working-class community level values leaving structural and social inequalities faced by these boys dismissed and individual character centred (e.g. Bagguley & Hussain, 2016). To consider this further Stahl (2018) used ethnographic methodology to theorise how aspirations are shaped through discourse and how 'respectability' and 'authenticity' are integral to positive identity

construction for the 23 White, working-class boys (aged between 14 and 16) in the study. The researcher found that the boys often identify with aspirational discourses while also constructing counter-narratives to neoliberal discourse in order to constitute themselves as valued. Earlier research (e.g. Weis & Cipollone, 2013) has argued that middle-class parents are driven to intensively parent and draw on networks of resources to produce particular identities in their children which reproduce power and power relations and normalise values around the need to gain power and use it to sustain or increase that in relation to others. In contrast, working-class boys generally draw on working-class values such as being authentic, having an anti-pretentious humour, 'fitting in' and not trying to better everyone else (e.g. Archer & Leathwood, 2003).

A quote from 'Harry' in Stahl's (2018) research illustrates that such values still dominate for young working-class boys in the UK:

"Cause I don't care if I'm not powerful. I just want to be an everyday person. I don't want to be like upper class and stuff like that" (pg. 564)

In sum, the author convincingly argues that boys such as Harry adhere to an 'ordinary' identity that directly resists middle-class values around both centrality of power and the desire for social mobility. Stahl goes on to argue that the identity of the 'everyday person' is about reclaiming a bond to an authentic identity and resisting subjectivities that are not akin to oneself.

A second research example scrutinises the way discourse in US schooling talk and practices disciplines Black masculinities, and the way in which Black young men can leverage power and resistance to, often, pathologising discourse. In this study Allen (2017) collected 300 hours of ethnographic data from teachers, parents and students to explore the positioning of four, Black working-class teenagers. Allen found that teachers often reproduced dominant classed, raced and gendered ideologies about the young men, understanding their practices as deviant, sexually or physically aggressive, and the author concluded that this positioning appeared to give little regard to intent. However, the students did actively resist condescension and blatant prejudice but also felt the level of discrimination towards them squeezed out any attempts on their part to be judged in a more positive manner.

“Teachers talk to you, like, they don't put you at the same level as your intelligence or I could say that they stereotype a lot. Like, okay, say if I wear saggy jeans, doo-rag, or something like that, they write me off and don't give me a chance to learn anything.” (Andre, pg. 274).

The author concludes by arguing that in resisting and directly calling out unfair treatment, the students performed a progressive Black, working-class masculinity that stands against and names institutional racism, therefore a direct threat to colour blind ideology which dominated teacher and other students' talk and often disallowed protests against racism.

Moving on, there has been some interesting and helpful work in the context of families, with working-class fathers who have, in recent times, become the source of blame for a number of issues (e.g. poverty and criminality) as a result of what some authors have labelled the 'fatherless society' discourse (see Tarrant and Ward, 2017). Recent research has been very much motivated by concerns for positive working-class fatherhood living in a society dominated with such a discourse. An interesting example of this research couples with this a critical concern around the increasing number of working-class boys given ADHD diagnosis in the UK (Alland and Harwood, 2016). An example of this work was carried out by Olsvold et al., (2019) who explored how middle-class and working-class fathers relate to their sons' ADHD diagnosis. The authors argue that, within service provision, and in society more generally, there is a demand on parents to adhere to a dominant medical discourse of ADHD. Therefore, they were also particularly interested in how the intersection of class and gender shapes different fathering identities and practices. In this study in-depth interviews were carried out with 16 fathers of boys diagnosed with ADHD. While all the 16 fathers interviewed were critical of the medicalised understanding of their sons, this discursive resistance is much stronger in the working-class fathers' talk than in the middle-class fathers'. Seen in a wider context, the fathers' critical voices offer considerable resistance to the medicalisation discourse.

For example, working-class fathers were more likely to locate the blame at societal level barriers for their son's hyperactivity (e.g. too few possibilities for physical activity). While others normalised hyperactivity and drew on their own childhood identities as boys to argue that this was not a new thing, only the medicalisation was new:

“Because when I was growing up, ADHD had not been invented and children were outside and played. They did not sit in front of a computer or TV all the time. When I came home in the evening, I was tired, I had played all day with friends and I went straight to bed.” (Frank, pg. 111)

The authors also report that working-class fathers often considered themselves as having strong empathy with their sons; this was particularly acute when they talked about their medicated son, where a reliance on medication was seen as a threat to the masculinised value of being independent and self-sufficient. Whereas middle-class fathers were more likely to draw on pathologising discourses of shame about their son’s unmedicated behaviour, such as displaying a lack of self-control and overt displays of emotion.

To summarise, here working-class fathers contest overwhelming medicalising discourse about their sons, emotionally attached and compassionate fatherhood and therefore counter an absent father discourse for working-class dads that resists shaming narratives.

In conclusion, for working-class men participants, prevailing ideology about them as failing are contested, while authentic identities such as ‘ordinariness’ challenge middle-class ideals and emotional connectedness dispels negative stereotypes about working-class men. Last, as an act of social protest, classed, gendered and raced systems of discrimination are named and shamed.

Cautionary notes: problems and limitations

We argue that the work we have reviewed in this chapter is crucial in highlighting both the force of and the extent to which undervaluing and subordinating discourse shapes selfhood and the way we relate to each other in all aspects of our lives, from homelife, education, work and leisure. In addition, the findings around the active construction and negotiation of class identities show that working-class people are not simply ‘written’ by dominant cultural discourses such as those evident in the British media (see chapter 4). This develops identity theory beyond traditional theory such as Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; 1981). However, in this chapter, we caution against a number of conclusions.

First, we need to guard against an uncritical celebration of instances of resistance and protest. Here we can see working-class peoples as not simply positioned by existing discourses but also positioning themselves within these, variably taking these up, resisting, negotiating and tailoring them to achieve a desired identity (Court & Court, 1998; Davies & Harré, 1990). However, as previously argued, at the same time, the options available are not limitless; multiple processes of structural power can set down restrictions upon the ways in which, and the extent to which, we can do this. As we have seen, in cultures dominated by discourses around the fluid classed subject and the fluid class system, being able to disrupt class and colour-blind discourse by calling out marginalisation and unequal treatment is an act of protest, tied to agency and constitutes empowerment, nonetheless (e.g. Allen, 2017).

A second cautionary tale is around an uncritical romanticised understanding of the authentic self as a means to resist conforming to damaging ideals. Indeed, the notion of working-class identities as more 'authentic' has been shown to have negative ramifications for women. For example, Rickett et al. (2013) noted how trans-exclusionary discourse often construes trans women as well-educated and time and economically privileged and therefore having the resources to engage in an effortful (yet inauthentic) performance of femininity (e.g. through the purchasing of expensive cosmetic products and procedures). Such women are positioned against cis gender women (often coded as working-class) who are to be regarded as more authentic/'real' women. Indeed, the relational construction of identity evident in the studies presented has often involved the derision of more economically privileged groups, which has negative implications for classed relations and for people from other marginalised groups.

We need to remember that authentic working-class selfhood is a feature of classism. As Skeggs (2005) argued, race and class can often collide to sometimes signify working-class communities as too authentic and too primitive (too much emotion, too loud) and work as a "fantastical menace" (pg. 970) to the middle-class. In addition, while the findings we have presented challenge some class stereotypes (e.g. working-class women as conformist and passive - Rickett & Roman, 2013; working-class fathers are distant/absent - Allan & Harwood, 2016), other harmful ones are reiterated (e.g. the working-class as lacking ambition - Stahl, 2018; working-class boys as naturally lacking impulse control - Olsvold et al; 2019).

Finally, despite the pockets of resistance noted in the later part of this chapter, as argued early on, classist tropes dominate while explicit discourses around class, class-based inequities and the emotional impact of classism continue to be rarely employed by research participants. Therefore class, classism and the pain and suffering associated with it remain opaque and largely unacknowledged and therefore examples of resistance and protest related to class identity work continue to be limited.

Summary

This chapter has focussed on four main themes that we hope have made a strong argument that the way socially-situated understandings drawn upon to define how we see ourselves and others are at the centre of understanding classed identities, relations and discrimination. In doing so, this has allowed us to characterise the cultural suppression of the acknowledgement of class inequalities (Skeggs, 2005). Here absence or, at the most, opaqueness, leaves social class identities often difficult to claim and prevailing social class discrimination difficult to name as socially produced classism.

Working-class participants within the prevailing ideology about them as failing and less valued do contest and resist, often using authentic identities to dispel negative stereotypes and classed, gendered and raced systems of discrimination are named and shamed. But these possibilities are limited, often occurring simultaneously with conforming negative stereotypes and are dwarfed by political ideologies that serve to camouflage classed identities and thwart attention to unequal classed differentials.

In the following chapter, we will focus on the ways in which critical social psychological approaches may be used to go beyond academia and apply critical knowledge in the 'real world' to make impact beyond the constraints of the literature presented in this present chapter. In doing so, we will focus on education, mental health, and physical health, aspects of life which are acutely impacted by social and economic inequalities, to derive clear implications for good practice that could provide the means for change from the 'grassroots up' to enable working-class people to live better lives.