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Discourse, Power and 'Submerged Identities': Towards a Critical Social Psychology of Social Class

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Introduction

Social psychologists have paid relatively little attention to social class in comparison to scholars from other disciplines such as sociology, where class has occupied a central position (see Holt & Griffin, 2005). This is a concern, as we will go on to argue, since social class impinges on nearly every aspect of human life (Bullock & Limbert, 2009) and has a profoundly psychological dimension (Holt & Griffin, 2005). More worryingly, a social psychological study of social class is perhaps the most pertinent it has been for some time since social and economic inequalities have increased dramatically in Britain in the last 30 years (Businelle et al., 2010) and there has been a pronounced rise in wage inequality in the United States since the 1980s (Autor, Katz & Kearney, 2008). When we look worldwide, we can now see a near-universal trend toward greater inequality based on income (For Whosoever Hath, 2007). Given this, the impact of social class on people's lives is likely to be more, not less, pronounced.

Traditional Marxist notions of 'social classes' see these as historically formed groups with specific roles and conflicting interests who occupy particular positions in the economic system of production in capitalist societies (see Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015; see also Arfken, this volume). Conversely, other popular (e.g. Bourdieusian) class analyses in the social sciences transcend this structural and materialist approach to draw further attention to the relational, symbolic and psychological dimensions of 'classmaking' (e.g. Bourdieu, 1987: 7). How we define and measure social class is the subject of debate within the social sciences (Bullock & Limbert, 2009). It is beyond the scope of the current chapter to provide a comprehensive review of these debates and issues (for fuller discussions see Phoenix & Tizard, 1996; Bullock & Limbert, 2009; Rubin, Denson, Kilpatrick, Matthews, Stehlik & Zyngier, 2014). In brief, we agree with Walkerdine (1996) that more holistic conceptualisations of social class beyond traditional (perhaps simplistic) notions are now warranted. For example, Holt and Griffin (2005) argue that in contemporary Western societies, a person's social class cannot necessarily be read from their position in the labour

market or education system, and often represents a complex interplay of a person's life experiences, family background, the social networks that they are part of, their language and speech style, lifestyle, mode of appearance and so on (Reid, 1989; Kraus & Stephens, 2012) - and people are often acutely aware of the hierarchical nature of these distinctions (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015). In addition, people's 'subjective' sense of which social class they belong to is often at odds with more formalised, objective measures (Argyle, 1994). Social class is therefore a complex and sometimes messy social and psychological matter (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015). As will be illustrated, within this complexity structural power inequalities are discursively reproduced in a variety of everyday settings and contexts, impacting (often negatively) upon our subjectivities, everyday experiences and how we relate to one another.

In this chapter, first, we critically review mainstream social psychological theory and research that has attempted to examine the impact of social class (or socio-economic status: SES) on intellectual capacities, attitudes, social behaviours and social relationships. We highlight the ways in which this work has not only produced impoverished accounts of social class, but further, how this has failed to problematize the class system in countries such as Britain and the United States. Indeed, through an upholding and often substantiation of current political ideals such as meritocracy and the notion of 'choice', this body of work may unwittingly help maintain and justify inequalities for working-class people. We then move on to discuss critical social psychological work on social class which has afforded a central role to experience, discourse, power relations and subjectivities. We examine the progress that this scholarly activity has made in highlighting the (often problematic) impact that class has on people's practices, identities and social relations, as well as the practices that people engage in in terms of resisting the ways in which they (and others) are positioned by class discourse. We consider what critical social psychological accounts of social class have to offer those seeking to alleviate the problems and suffering caused by social and economic inequalities and/or those seeking to challenge and dismantle the class system. Finally, we review the current 'state of play' for critical social psychological work in this area and consider positive and necessary future directions for this field of study.

Mainstream Social Psychological Accounts of Social Class

Mainstream social psychological work has often focussed on difference between the abilities, motivations and cognitions of people according to the social class position (or SES) that they occupy. However, similar to feminist criticisms of 'sex difference' research (e.g. Gilligan, 1982), this work often implicitly assumes a particular standard (in this case a middle-class standard) that positions middle-class (and upper-class) abilities, values and social and economic worlds as the reference point - with working-class people compared unfavourably against such a 'standard' ,rendered 'deficient', 'less than' or problematic and in need to regulation and care.

The first example of such work is the body of research that seeks to examine, first, whether persons of a working-class (or 'lower' class) background have lower levels of intelligence than their middle- (or upper-) class counterparts, and second, whether these lower levels can explain their social and economic hierarchical positioning in work and life. A highly cited review of the literature (Gottfredson, 2004) argues for a replacement of the notion of unequal social class hierarchies with an IQ continuum which reflects graded, intellectual capabilities to achieve and succeed in life, and where 'differences' are attributed to the heritability to succeed and survive through the conferment of intelligence. Similarly, Nettle's (2003) work posits that intelligence is causal in processes of social mobility by its link with occupational attainment. This research looks at longitudinal data from the British National Child Development Study. Despite results indicating a strong correlation between fathers' 'social class' (occupation) and attained 'social class' (occupation), the author argues that the most significant results show that intelligence test scores at 11 years old predict class mobility in adulthood uniformly across all social classes, therefore revealing a high level of social mobility and meritocracy in contemporary Britain.

In sum, this body of research locates the problem of a lack of social mobility within working-class people by reproducing the meritocratic premise that all people are exposed to the same level, quality and type of educational environment, therefore an (in)ability to achieve success within this 'level playground' is due in something inside the person (e.g. Gottfredson, 2004). However, the 'level playground' can be regarded as an illusion, since working-class children are repeatedly exposed to lower quality education and socio-economic disadvantage (e.g. Stransfield, Clark, Rodgers & Cardwell, 2011). As Lott (2012) argues, even when working-class children do access well-resourced education they are routinely short-changed; expectations are much lower for them and social class can be a dominant force in the classroom whereby the working-class are 'othered' from the 'ideal' (middle-

class) student. This may leave working-class children less likely to profit from education than their middle-class counterparts (Lott, 2012). Littler (2013) also argues that this elitist, essentialist, and individualist "myth of difference" (p. 54) has led to apartheid education that, in turn, led to a disproportionate amount of resources being spent on children measured to be 'clever'. In addition, this notion of more 'intelligent' working-class people moving up the occupational ladder to 'escape' constructs working-class cultures as 'other' and spaces to avoid or 'get out of' (Tyler, 2013). Lastly, meritocracy as an ideal obscures economic and social inequities, dissolving them in gradients of talent, effort and inherent abilities and thereby legitimising power and privilege.

However, there is a nice example of social cognitive work that does attempt to disturb the taken for granted myth of meritocracy (Spencer and Castano, 2007). Here it is argued that negative stereotypes associated with working-class children result in 'stereotype threat' which produces poor performance on IQ tests as a result of students fearing confirmation of such stereotypes. Using a revised general intelligence test, coupled with a demographic form asking for parents' income and occupation (presented either before or after completing the test), results showed that working-class children underperformed if class was made salient before the test while performing equal to the middle-class counterparts when class was made salient after the test. Worryingly, provision of such demographic information is commonplace before such tests and working-class children who apply for financial support for the costs of tests (common in the US) often experience "humiliating" (p.g. 428) levels of attention to these demographics to prove they are poor enough to be eligible.

The second main trend in social psychological research on social class typically pathologises the practices of people from 'lower down' the socio-economic scale as deficient in their 'motivations' to live a successful, healthy life (see Day, Rickett and Woohouse, 2014). For example, Kasser, Ryan, Zax, and Sameroff (1995) reportedly found that adolescents whose mothers had low educational attainment and income were more materially oriented, valuing financial success more than self-acceptance (e.g. hopes for autonomy), affiliation (e.g. hopes for positive relations with family/friends) and community feeling (desires to improve the world through activism). The authors argued that these young people value conformity more than self-direction,paying less attention to their own desires andpreferring to seek rewards from external sources. Further, the authors argue that young people growing up in 'high-crime, low income environments' (Kasser et al., 1995. p. 912) see conformity as a requirement for securing a job and financial success as a way of escape,

therefore placing too much emphasis on money 'relative to other more prosocial and growth-oriented values' (Kasser et al., 1995, p. 912).

Thus, in this body of research, personal growth, self-expression and self-directed behaviour are standards which individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds fail to match up to. That those from middle-class backgrounds may have already acquired a level of financial security and material resources that enables them to direct their attention away from meeting basic needs towards 'growth and self-expression' is not acknowledged (Kasser et al., 1995, p. 907). In sum, poor and working-class people are positioned as subscribing to a value system which is not only different to socio-economically privileged groups but also inferior, superficial and detrimental to 'self-development'. In addition, this justifies social inequality by implying that working-class value systems are faulty while also obscuring an examination of structural and ideological barriers to social change.

Lastly, we look at the social-cognitive analyses of health outcomes which are understood and defined in terms of SES (see Day, 2012 for more in-depth analyses). Research into inequalities in health has tended to focus on those of 'lower SES' and has sought to identify the biological, behavioural and psychological factors that contribute to disparities in health outcomes. For example, being from a 'disadvantaged background' has been associated with 'negative cognitive-emotional factors' such as hostility, anxiety and depression, which have all been found to impact negatively on health (e.g. Hatch & Dohrenwend, 2007). The predominant focus though has been on 'health-risk behaviours', defined as 'habits or practices that increase an individual's likelihood of poor health outcomes' (Goy, Dodds, Rosenberg & King, 2008, p. 314). For example, lower SES has been linked to a range of health-risk behaviours such as smoking, poor diet, physical inactivity and heavy drinking (e.g. Wardle & Steptoe, 2003). Here, inequalities in health status are conceptualised in terms of differentials in individual health-behaviours and lifestyle patterns (e.g. Richter et al., 2006). It is argued that working-class people tend to be unhealthier because they do not take adequate care of their health and make poor choices. Indeed, a research paper by Lynch, Kaplan & Salonen (1997) is actually entitled 'Why do poor people behave poorly?' Unsurprisingly then, current health-risk reduction and health promotion interventions target the health behaviours of those from lower SES groups and the beliefs and attitudes believed to underpin these behaviours (e.g. Myers, 2009). Once again, working-class people have been characterized as problematic, with the failure of such interventions being

blamed on the targets who, it has been claimed, are more resistant (presumably than middle-class people) to behaviour change (Lynch *et al.,* 2007).

Walkerdine (2002) argues that psychology has played a special role in promoting the neo-liberalist notion (which she contends is a fiction) of choice. Neo-liberalist discourses (Rose, 1999) are said to be widespread in late capitalist societies and emphasize individualism, agency and the possibility of personal transformation. As discussed, mainstream research presents choice as located within the individual in the form of cognitions, withthe assumption that these (along with the behaviours that they unpin) can be altered or modified (although such interventions are often unsuccessful). As with research on intelligence and motivations, notions of poverty, inequality and class oppression become an 'absent present' (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). There is some acknowledgement in the mainstream literature that class-related stressors (e.g. poverty) and discrimination may play an important role in health disparities. However, such factors have to date been under-researched, and when acknowledged, often treated as 'bolt on' variables in an overall conceptual model rather than pervasive and central issues that need to be tackled in social and political ways (see Myers, 2009).

Overall, mainstream social psychological work on social class conceptualises working-class people as having lower levels of intelligence and 'key' motivations, or as making the wrong choices (possibly as a result of these 'deficits') to live a successful and healthy life. The causes for such 'deficits' or the enactment of such 'poor' reasoning are seen as residing within the individual either in a modifiable manner (as in social cognitions), or in an inherent, essentialist, unmodifiable manner (as in level of intelligence). The reproduction of such meritocratic and neo-liberalist discourses around class leaves working-class people to be regarded as either a drain on or waste of public resources or as deserving of their social and economic positioning. This, along with notions of individualism and agency, bolsters classism, or what Tyler (2008) calls 'class disgust'. Mainstream social psychology has played a pivotal role. It is unclear, and perhaps uncharitable to conclude that social psychologists have intentionally set out to blame vulnerable people and place sole responsibility for social, economic or health outcomes on to individuals (see Lee, Lemyre, Turner, Orpana & Krewski*,* 2008). However, as Day previously concludes in her analysis of health psychology and class (2012) "critical psychologists are concerned with the outcomes or consequences of theorising, empirical claims and actions (for example, interventions) rather than the intentions of individual psychologists." (pp. 65).

Critical Social Psychological Approaches to Social Class

Gender, ethnicity and race have received more comprehensive treatment from critical psychologists than social class (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). This neglect has been recognised and addressed in some quarters and feminist psychologists, notably, have produced some excellent work examining intersections between class and gender and the impact of social class on women's lives (e.g. Wakerdine, 1991; 1996), with the journal *Feminism & Psychology* publishing special issues focussed explicitly on this issue.

'Critical social psychology' encompasses a complex set of theoretical frameworks and approaches to analysis which make it difficult to 'pin down' and define precisely (see Wetherell, 1999). Indeed, those such as Parker (2009) have argued that critical psychology must provide resources to transform psychology without *"getting stuck in any model, ethos or worldview"* (p. 84). That said, there are a number of different 'streams' of theorising and research on social class that could be described as 'critical social psychological'. These typically utilise qualitative research methods to achieve a number of common aims: Firstly, to produce contextualised accounts of social class which avoid the sort of individualism that often characterises mainstream work (see Bullock & Limbert, 2009). Secondly, a commitment to place poverty, inequality and oppression as central and to produce accounts that problematize class inequality, class relations and class discourse. Thirdly, to examine how class intersects with gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, able-bodiedness, geography and so forth to produce diverse experiences and social identities (Griffin, 1993), and to acknowledge that class cannot simply be 'separated out' from other social categories or treated as a discrete variable. A final aim is to provide marginalised groups whose experiences have often been neglected by mainstream psychology, such as poor and working-class people, with a voice in research (e.g. Walkerdine, 1991; 1996) rather than treating them as the sum of a number of variables (low socio-economic status and problematic cognitions), or speaking for them.

One tradition of feminist psychological work on social class has examined lived experiences of class and what class membership 'feels' like (e.g. Reay, 1999; 2005). An area of research of interest here has been class transitions - moving from one social class to another - and the psychological impact which ensues (e.g. Walkerdine, 2003; Reay, 2002). Such research has demonstrated that (perhaps contrary to popular belief) moving from

working-class to middle-class status (e.g. via higher educational achievements) is fraught with difficulties. For example, Reay (2002) conducted interviews with working-class higher education students and uncovered struggles around feelings of belonging (e.g. many of the participants said that they felt like an 'imposter'), identity and authenticity (i.e. maintaining an authentic and coherent sense of self). This is perhaps unsurprising given research evidence that classism is often rife at universities (Langhout, Drake & Rosselli, 2009). For Reay's participants, working-class identity increasingly lacked authenticity, whilst the veneer of 'middle-classness' felt like a façade, therefore the person finds themselves frozen in limbo between one class and another. This work is important, not only for highlighting complex emotional and identity issues associated with social class, but also for challenging popular Western understandings of 'upward mobility' as unproblematic and highlighting the barriers experienced by working-class students who enter into higher education.

The emotional distress that can accompany classed experiences has been addressed more directly by psychologists employing more critical perspectives for a number of years. For example, psychologists have highlighted strong links between insufficient or dwindling economic resources, classism and experiences of working-class life in general and psychological distress and deterioration (e.g. Jahoda, 1987). This often includes those who have moved from the working-class into the middle-class. For example, in a special issue of *Feminism & Psychology* devoted to social class, Palmer (1996) connects this distress to feelings of shame and fear and lowered self-confidence that are often experienced by working-class people and argues that an important challenge for mental health practitioners is to assist clients in conceiving of their problems as resulting from limitations in other people's perspectives rather than from personal inadequacy. More recently, a group called *Psychologists Against Austerity* has mobilised on the Internet (https://psychagainstausterity.wordpress.com/). This is a group of psychologists who are actively campaigning against the implementation of austerity policies by the British government, pointing to psychological evidence that these policies have damaging psychological costs. In the United States, psychologists such as Bernice Lott and Heather Bullock have similarly advocated for policy changes that address economic injustice. They critique cultural constructions of the 'welfare problem', arguing that poverty that is the problem (Lott & Bullock, 2007). This work is crucial in highlighting how individual suffering often results from wider historical developments and political and structural conditions like inequality, exploitation and alienation (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015).

Another stream 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). This body of work employs discourse analysis to scrutinise the functions of class discourse, such as legitimising class inequalities by making these appear natural or inevitable or the result of merit rather than structural inequalities. It also considers how such discourse places people within unequal relations of power and the forms of subjectivity that this discourse makes available. For example, Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) examined classed and gendered discourse on so-called 'lifestyle' and 'self-improvement' programmes on British television and found that such shows often depict a spectre of 'working-class failure'. Moreover, a central character within such programmes is often a working-class woman who is the focus of transformation and correction and positioned as insufficiently self-monitoring. They argue that this 'failed' subjectivity is depicted as uninhabitable and 'Other' to the neo-liberal ideals that are promoted, whilst a discourse of poverty and oppression is largely absent. This and similar studies (e.g. Tyler, 2008) are important in that they highlight the media as a powerful institution where problematic discourses around class and associated subjectivities are reproduced. Further, as highlighted by Ringrose and Walkerdine, these mediated discourses function in ways that render invisible the wider socio-cultural, economic and political conditions that contribute to problems often associated with poverty such as poor diet, constructing these instead as the result of personal failing.

These studies are important in highlighting the role of discourse in justifying social structures based on class difference. This work arguably builds upon 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). However, one limitation of these studies is that these fail to examine how people *engage* with such patterns of meaning in their everyday lives and how class discourse constitutes people's subjectivities. Some critical social psychological studies have examined people's talk around class and other, intersecting social identities with illuminating results. For example, Phoenix and Tizard (1996) interviewed a diverse sample of 248, 14-18 year old Londoners in order to explore their social identities. The authors 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. Further, there was a general tendency for the participants to describe themselves as 'middle-class', a tendency, particularly amongst white people, that is well-documented (see Bullock & Limbert, 2009). In addition, some accounts provided by the middle-class participants positioned working-class people as inferior and figures from popular culture (e.g. television shows) were drawn upon as typifying working-class lifestyles which were derided (see also Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). This demonstrates the impact of class 'stereotypes' identified in popular culture by those such as Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) and Tyler (2008) can have on everyday understandings and class relations. In general, the participants distinguished between 'us' and 'them' on the basis of commodities, practices and lifestyles that have strong class connotations (e.g. housing, dress, behaviour and economic resources), and 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.

In another study which has examined the relational construction of class identities, Holt and Griffin (2005) examined the talk of young, middle-class participants (who again, were diverse in terms of gender, ethnic and sexual groupings) in the context of leisure spaces such as pubs and clubs, and found that they referred to social class in highly coded ways. This typically involved referring to 'types' of people and places that were clearly 'classed', for example, referring to working-class people as 'townies' or 'locals', and it was assumed that these understandings were socially-shared ones that would be readily understood. The authors argue that explicit talk around class has become taboo in contemporary British society where an ideal of 'classlessness' is promoted (Bradley, 1996) and indeed, talk around class was often accompanied by nervous laughter or an apology. Interestingly, Holt and Griffin (2005) also describe how the class prejudice identified in their study was also shot through with ambivalent desire for the (exotic) working-class Other and certain aspects of (more authentic) working-class culture. This kind of complexity 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 SIT in theorising social class, see Argyle, 1994; Day, Rickett & Woolhouse, 2014; Holt & Griffin, 2005).

This work provides more nuanced and sophisticated accounts of social identities and social relations and the important role that social class plays in these. It would seem that the contemporary discursive landscape in the Western world is instructive here in a number of ways. Firstly, this has been characterised by a cultural suppression of the acknowledgement of class and class inequalities (Skeggs, 2005), whereby for example, political and economic interests and conflicts have been reified as individual differences in terms of character, personality or lifestyle (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015). This is illustrated in the Holt and Griffin (2005) study where, although the participants drew upon notions of class difference, this was largely in relation to commodities, lifestyles, leisure activities etc. A discourse of *power* differentials was largely absent. Secondly, there are the kinds of stigmatizing and pathologising discourses around the working-class that are highly visible in the media (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Tyler, 2008). This discursive landscape may have resulted in what Bradley (1996) describes as 'submerged identities' (p.72) in relation to class. In other words, talk around class and identification with a class group (particularly the working-class) has become difficult, in some instances embarrassing or anxiety-provoking, and so may be avoided altogether (Holt & Griffin, 2005). This marked 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).

So far, we have provided a fairly disheartening overview of the ways in which class privilege is discursively reproduced whilst at the same time obscured, and some of the consequences of this for everyday discursive practices, social identities and social relations. However, that is not to say that people always buy into such discourses in straightforward and unproblematic ways. Further, although it has been highlighted that there is a lack of positively loaded positions for working-class women in the UK context (Wagner & McLaughlin, 2015), a number of recent critical social psychological studies have highlighted examples of resistance on the part of British working-class girls and women. For example, Woolhouse, Day, Rickett and Milnes (2012) conducted a study which involved focus group discussions with working-class adolescent girls from South Yorkshire in the UK to examine the discourses that they drew upon around femininity, food and eating. We found that many culturally-sanctioned and promoted ideals and practices, such as eating small amounts of 'healthy' food, displaying little enthusiasm for food and being concerned with weight and

appearance were understood by the participants as classed (e.g. something that 'posh' women do) and were often explicitly derided and rejected. Similarly, recent critical studies in the field of organisational psychology have examined how working-class women who work in police work (e.g. Rickett, 2014) and door supervision or 'bouncing' (e.g. Rickett & Roman, 2013) have also identified constructions of the ideal female worker as imbued with gendered and classed ideals around being safe, risk-aversive, 'feminine' and 'ladylike'. Scholars such as Skeggs (1997) have argued that such bourgeois models of passive and 'frail' femininity have been promoted by privileged groups and have often been inaccessible to working-class women because, for example, of the physical labour that they have traditionally been engaged in. Although fewer people now work in industries characterised by heavy physical labour due to deindustrialisation (Budgeon, 2014), the work that the women in these studies perform still involves a physical (and occasionally violent) element. Consequently, these constructions of the ideal female worker were rejected by the participants in these studies as unconducive to the type of work that they do, oppressive and exclusionary. In contrast, they positioned themselves as courageous and wily women who were 'not afraid to get stuck in' (Rickett, 2014). Similarly, Day, Gough and McFadden (2003) who (like Holt and Griffin, 2005) also examined discourse in the context of leisure spaces and 'night outs', found that the working-class women in their study also challenged classed idealsfrail and passive femininity by positioning themselves as women who 'could look after themselves' on a night out. In addition, middle-class women were often ridiculed by them as inauthentic and pretentious. These studies demonstrate that working-class, feminine identities can be negotiated, despite the negative discursive landscape previously discussed, in ways that are imbued with power (albeit ones that arguably draw upon normative discourses around the 'tough' and unpretentious working-class women who is unaffected by body image ideals etc.).

Applying critical perspectives on class

Critical social psychological research, theorising and related methodologies have important implications for 'real world' settings and have been drawn upon in attempts to raise awareness around, and directly challenge, the oppressive effects of classism and practices which serve to reproduce and reinforce class boundaries. Such critical work is most notable in the domains of education and health, and perhaps to a lesser extent, employment, leisure, and media representations. Given this predominance of applied research in the areas of

education and health, and following on from earlier criticism of mainstream social psychological research in these areas, we provide an overview of some of this important and illuminating work in these two respective fields.

As noted, it appears to be the field of education that has attracted most attention in relation to psychology, social class and the effects of classism (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). This is perhaps unsurprising given the cultural value placed on education and arguments that 'Sites of education…are a rich laboratory in which to study the experiences of class' (Ostrove & Cole, 2003, p. 678). In an intriguing ethnographic study, and with the ultimate goal of providing the foundations for school reform (in the United States), Langhout and Mitchell (2008) examined the 'hidden curriculum' (defined as 'the values, norms and beliefs transmitted *via* the structure of schooling' ibid. p. 593) in a second grade classroom (aged 7 – 8 years old) . Part of the 'hidden curriculum', built around White middle-class values and assumptions, was a requirement for children to demonstrate their enthusiasm, interest and learning in ways that corresponded to the school's behavioural and disciplinary code; if they failed to do this (for example, responding to the teacher's question without raising their hand) they were reprimanded; these 'offenders' consequently began to show signs of despondency and disengagement. The authors noted that this occurred far more frequently among Black and Latino boys and argued that, 'The hidden curriculum, therefore, reinforces institutionalized racism and classism with the meta-communication that working-class and poor racial and ethnic minority students, especially boys, do not belong in school' (Langhout & Mitchell, 2008, p. 596).

In higher education, similar processes appear to be in operation. Langhout, Drake and Rosselli (2009) found that not only are students from poor and working-class backgrounds more likely to experience classism, but being subjected to classism was found to be associated with a host of negative outcomes and experiences, such as a decreased sense of belonging (to their place of study), poorer psychosocial outcomes, and intentions to drop out of college (Langhout, Drake & Rosselli, 2009). Based on their findings, the authors recommended an array of policies and structural changes that may help to address the classed inequalities faced by poor and working-class students (and the privileges afforded to upper- and middle-class students). These include implementing transition programmes aimed at helping students navigate what might be an unfamiliar system; introducing poor/working-class students to staff members who identify with being from a similar background in order to develop social support networks and, at the level of infrastructure, critically scrutinizing

university policies and procedures that may unwittingly facilitate classism (Langhout, Drake & Rosselli, 2009). Importantly however, they also advocate the incorporation of critical studies on social class into the curriculum to raise awareness of class-based issues amongst all students, but particularly those whose class privilege may be hidden or taken-for-granted. We concur strongly with this latter recommendation and at our own institution include course components whichprovide students with a language to talk (critically) about class;we commonly have a number of students who choose a critical focus on class in their final year undergraduate projects.

Acknowledging the paucity of research examining the practices of privileged groups which serve to perpetuate inequalities, Stephens and Gillies (2012) explored the talk and practices of affluent and disadvantaged parents (in New Zealand) in relation to choosing a school for their child/ren and the advantages or constraints conferred upon each of these groups in respect to this 'choice'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they found that the 'affluent group' were more able to draw upon the necessary resources (e.g. income, housing location and social networks) to secure advantage for their child in terms of schooling. In contrast, parents from the poorer neighbourhood were restricted by work commitments, family circumstances and the need for support in their attempts to access 'good' schools and be involved in the school community (Stephens & Gillies, 2012). Notably however, one mother from the lower-income group had succeeded in sending her daughters to a 'prestigious' school but talked of the predominant white middle-class culture of the school to which she felt a lack of belonging and 'of being stopped on the street by a woman who suggested that her daughters should not be at the school' (ibid. p. 154). This example not only undermines prevailing neo-liberal rhetoric around notions of 'choice' and upward social mobility as being achievable and unproblematic, but also highlights how 'the actions of those of higher status…work against the development of poor communities' (ibid. p. 146). The authors conclude by arguing for a shift away from interventions aimed at developing disadvantaged communities solely from *within*, to attending to the detrimental effects resulting from inequalities *between* social groups (Stephens & Gillies, 2012).

Moving on to a discussion of critical applied work in the area of health and social class, Melluish and Bulmer (1999) reported on a truly inspiring men's health action project (in the UK) which was developed in an attempt to challenge and move away from dominant understandings of men's psychological distress as resulting from (in part) 'male socialization' (ibid. p. 93) and constructions of masculinity. The authors argued that this type of

understanding overlooks the ways in which social class shapes men's experiences and articulations of distress, might misrepresent working-class men's experiences in particular and, importantly, may lead to therapeutic interventions focused on the 'intrapsychic' and "men's 'inner worlds'" (ibid. p.93) when these may not be helpful or appropriate. Further, they argued that working-class men who experience unemployment are subject to a range of negative consequences such as social isolation and feelings of powerlessness resulting from a loss of social solidarity, valued identity, and structure to their daily lives. Given this, the authors helped set up a project for unemployed working-class men who were experiencing psychological distress with the aim of providing a forum for them to share experiences and offer mutual support and solidarity.

Although there was initial input from professional practitioners, their involvement became more peripheral as the men began to take more control (for example, by establishing a management committee – Melluish & Bulmer, 1999). Gradually, the men's articulations of their distress and experiences shifted from individualised accounts to more collective understandings linked to socio-political issues impacting at the local and societal levels. The men began to frame their experiences through a lens of class, and mental distress as a social rather than personal issue. The authors conclude by calling for a re-conceptualisation of how we make sense of mental distress, what are considered as appropriate forms of support, and the necessity of taking social class into account when formulating these understandings.

Finally in this section, we turn our attention to the valuable contributions of William Ming Liu (e.g. Liu et al., 2004; Liu et al., 2009) to the area of social class (and classism), counselling and therapeutic practices. First, Liu et al. (2009) along with others (e.g. Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 2009) argue that therapeutic models and practices are underpinned by middle-class values and assumptions yet, as is widely documented, poor and working-class people are more likely to experience psychological distress (e.g. Liu, 2011). This raises questions around the suitability of therapeutic practices to meet the needs of poor and working-class service users (Liu et al., 2004; Melluish & Bulmer, 1999). In recognition of this, and the salience of class and classism in shaping psychologies and identities (along with other intersecting dimensions of difference - Liu et al., 2004), Liu et al., (2004) argue that as a starting point, counsellors need to reflect on and interrogate their own class positionings, classism and personal experiences of classism and consider how these may play out in their work with clients. Following on from this, counsellors should explore the client's mental suffering through a 'class lens', for example by gaining an understanding of their current and

historical class (and economic) positionings, the client's own understanding of class, and their current or historic experiences of classism (Liu et al., 2004). In a nutshell, Liu (2011) argues that class (and experiences of classism) are absolutely central to people's sense of self and well-being and therefore the exploration of class-related experiences are essential for more meaningful understandings of distress and effective interventions.

Current Trends

Three key areas of interest can be identified in recent and current critical social psychological literature related to class. As argued previously, increasing attention has been given to the ways in which class and classed identities intersect with other dimensions of difference such as gender (e.g. Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong & Lotus Seeley, 2014), sexuality, (e.g. Rickett, Craig & Thompson, 2013), dis/ability (e.g. Goodley, 2011), 'race' (e.g. Langhout & Mitchell, 2008) and so forth. A further area of enquiry seeks to examine how class is constituted through talk, social interaction and practices, and the ways in which classed discourse is produced and reproduced to reinforce class boundaries, for example through processes of Othering (e.g. Holt & Griffin, 2005). Finally, as introduced earlier, interest has grown into exploring the emotional and subjective experiences of occupying particular classed positions and being subjected to classism (e.g. Charlesworth, 2005). In the current climate of the imposition of punitive austerity measures (in the UK and in many other countries) we would argue that it is even more incumbent on researchers to further engage in research which exposes the pernicious effects of inequality at the level of the individual, groups and wider society.

Summary

To date, social class has been insufficiently theorised and researched within psychology. Mainstream social psychological research on the impact of social class standing or socio-economic status has tended to obscure structural inequalities and power differentials. Instead, problems associated with poverty and lack of opportunity have been located at the level of the individual, and often there has been a suggestion that these are relatively 'fixed' or at

least the result of psychologised shortcomings. In contrast, critical social psychological work in this area has afforded a central position to everyday experiences of class and classism, class discourse, power relations and subjectivities, with a view to disrupting dominant narratives which justify the status quo (e.g. around meritocracy). This work has in turn informed applied efforts to raise awareness around and challenge classism and practices which disadvantage working-class people in a variety of settings including educational, health and therapeutic contexts, and to agitate for social policy changes (e.g. around austerity).

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