

# The feeling of class and feeling classed: student life and class identity.

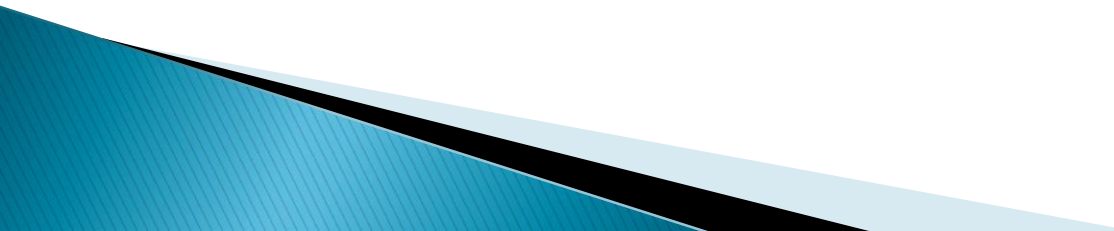
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# The injuries of class: Megan

- ▶ *My grandad's never liked the idea of me working, again because he is quite traditional with his odd views and he's quite stuck up..... He sort of insinuated that I was into prostitution because I worked at the restaurant.... He actually said to my family, 'I know how much she wants this car and you know what girls do, get into. ' And I was, 'no I'm a waitress.'. He has a really old-fashioned view of things. And I think a lot of people do when you're a waitress, it's not just old people. .. When I was a waitress I got so many 'you're so stupid', you're so incompetent.' There's still this really big thing if you work as a waitress or in a shop then you have nothing and your life's going nowhere, which is ridiculous because even if that was the case there's still no need to talk down to people even if they were just going to work in a shop. It's their life, there's no need to think that they're less than you. But my grandad is very like that, he's always hated the idea that I'd have to work, that my parents could not possibly afford for me not to work. Like if I wanted to do anything, like, I would have to work. So I worked.*

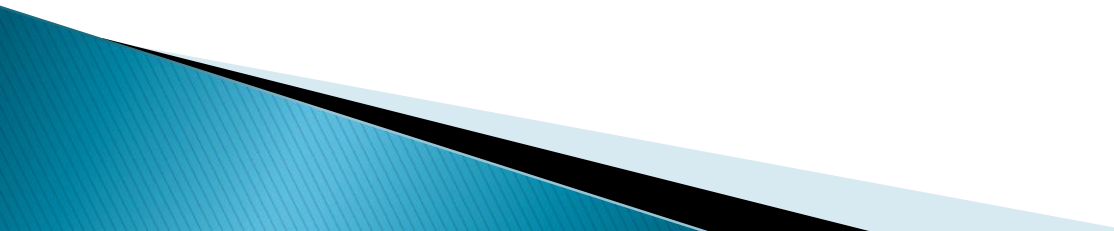
# Background: the return of class

- ▶ Class – pasties, supper and tax relief for the rich
  - ▶ Major's classless society; NL social exclusion (Levitas)
  - ▶ Class in sociology– still at the margins?
    - Nuffield mobility studies
    - CRESC – class and consumption
    - The newer sociology of class
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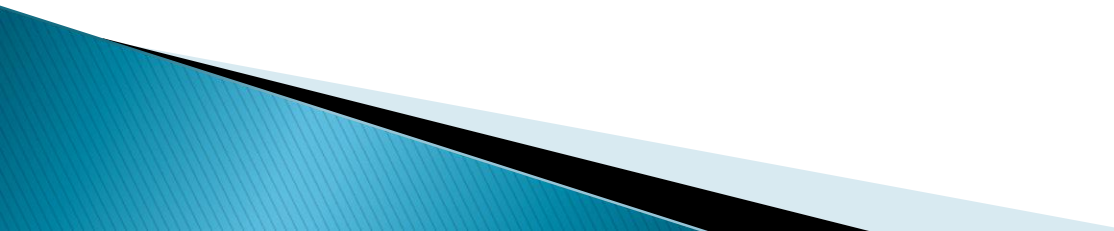
# Whither the working class?

- ▶ Lack of empirical studies
- ▶ Exceptions: Devine, Charlesworth, Atkinson
- ▶ Still a bit of a foreign country
- ▶ Bristol Class Cluster
  - Draws on NSC, Bourdieu
  - Attempts to add in material factors
  - *Ordinary Lives* Atkinson, Bradley and Sales: funder ESRC
  - *Paired Peers* UWE and UoB , Bradley, Bathmaker, Waller, Hoare, Ingram, Mellor and Abrahams: funder Leverhulme Trust
- ▶ This paper draws on *Paired Peers* data to explore processes of identification

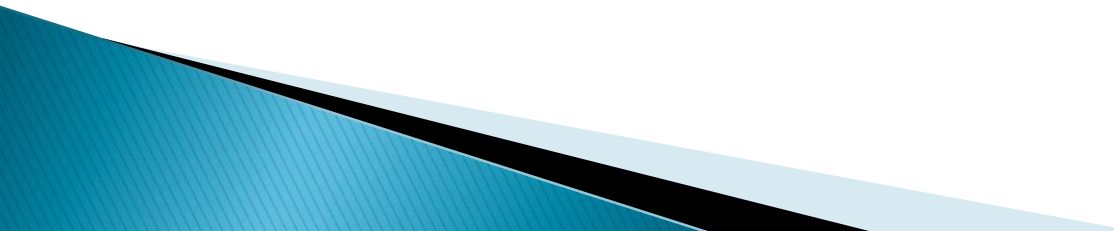
# The Research Project

- To compare the experience of students from different backgrounds in 2 different universities, in a range of subjects
  - To do this utilising a matched pairs method
  - To follow a cohort of pairs over their 3 years of study
  - To explore what factors help students to academic success
  - To investigate the impact of different forms of capital: economic, social, cultural, virtual, embodied etc
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# Methods: research design

- ▶ Pairing structure: Pairs matched by class, campus, subject
  - ▶ eg 8 law students: 4 from each uni, at each 2 w/c, 2 m/c
  - ▶ Target 80 but initial over-recruitment
  - ▶ Had to be from subjects taught at both unis
  - ▶ Recruitment of pairs: biology, drama, economics & accountancy, engineering, English, geography, history, law, politics, psychology, sociology. 90 students
  - ▶ Recruited from 1st week induction sessions
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# Methods: first year

- ▶ 1st interview: an unstructured account of how the students came to be at UoB or UWE. 90 completed
  - ▶ 2nd Interview: semi – structured: how they have settled into student life and experienced their first year. 76 completed, including 30 pairs
  - ▶ Photos of their Christmas holidays
  - ▶ ‘A day in the life’: short diary accounts
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# Megan again

*My boyfriend's just read so much and spent so many like.. just time doing what he needs and like bettering himself. And I couldn't help thinking like every weekend I worked both days, maybe like 16 hours or something over the weekend, and all that time you're serving pizza to horrible, ungrateful people who are yelling at you.. you're just thinking 'oh I could be practising my violin' or 'I could be reading'.. It just feels like a complete waste of time .. you're not going anywhere, you're doing something that's just awful for you.*

- ▶ *Because I was friends with such wealthy people it was never enough. Like I would work all the time and never have enough money.*

▶ *My boyfriend is able to do all these musical instruments and they have horses, and I love riding, and just things that are all around him I can never keep up with. And my other friend, his parents will just give him their credit card like any time.. and he was always wearing like ridiculously expensive clothing.*



# Class awareness

- ▶ Students do not talk of class directly in relation to themselves, although may refer to their family and background in class terms
- ▶ Result of the disturbing moral discourse and stigma round class (v Bradley 1999; Savage 2004)
- ▶ Springs from sense of difference
- ▶ At Bristol working-class students compared their financial habits with m/c students
- ▶ Others focus on the social and cultural gaps
- ▶ Also process of 'Othering' by u/m/c elite who display contempt for those beneath them

*`They just spend money like it grows on trees ... go out and go shopping and buy more clothes and I'm like "but you have clothes, you don't need it, you have a wardrobe full of clothes, you don't need any more" (f UoB w/c)*

- ▶ I'm the only person in X Hall from a state school...there's 10 people on my law course of 250 who have been to a state school & the majority of them are like "oh I could have gone to boarding school but my parents thought it was a waste of money". I know no-one from my background, That's why I find it so difficult to adjust, when no-one can relate to me (f UoB w/c).*

# Samantha: u/m/c background, from Leeds –mining family

- ▶ Considered herself m/c until she came to Bristol
- ▶ Residential homogeneity and financial comfort conceal class
- ▶ *I kind of hide away in lectures. I just sit with my three or four geography friends and we always sit together because we're in the same boat. I fit in with those people but I don't fit in with everyone on my course... There's a lot of people who are very different. A lot of people are what I would class as a higher class than me. Like they're all posh .. ,I don't know why but naturally I separate myself from them. If I talk to them we'd probably find we have things in common, but they don't talk to me and I don't talk to them*



# Stigmatised because of going to a state school

- ▶ State/private distinction becomes a proxy for class
- ▶ *I was one of the few people from a state school and that straightaway separated me from them.. They say there isn't a class barrier , but there is and I notice it a lot. Like everyone in my flat- one of us went to public school and the rest of us are all from state school – so I feel more comfortable there. I never felt it at school because we were all in the same boat.*
- ▶
- ▶ *Because I'm not privately schooled that puts me a level down to those who are. If I've got a degree from here and I'm not privately schooled and someone who is privately schooled has a degree, will that make a difference?*

# Craig: experience of u/m/c superiority– gradations within m/c

- ▶ *Yeah I had an interview at King's College. Because I wasn't sure if I wanted to go there because I didn't think I'd quite fit in with it all, with their like posh, bit weird kind of ways. So I wasn't sure, so I thought "I'm going to apply for it", it was my fifth option and I was going to do it properly and go for King's College.. But after a day there in King's College I didn't fancy it any more. The people put me off ..alot of snobs and rahs as people here call them...*
- ▶ *Everyone else was a lot more posh. ...I was talking to one guy just while we were sat waiting for a test we had to do, and...so he asked me where I was from, so I say I'm from Sheffield, and he says "oh I didn't know they had private schools in the north"! So I thought, OK, so I thought I'll have some fun here, I said "no mate I went to a comp", and his jaw dropped,*

# The rah image and w/c isolation

- ▶ *What is the perfect private schoolboy? Probably the white, very sporty, very academic, good looking, school colours wearing, charitably involved person. (m Uob m/c)*
- ▶
- ▶ *They wear like short skirts, like a nice little top and nice high heels and the hair's all done, your make-up's all done (f Uob w/c)*
- ▶ *I always say that you can spot a Bristol Uni student and you can spot a UWE student.. Their accent, the way they talk, it's obviously standard English, whereas I've got a bit of an accent and so have most people. We call them "the rahs" which means "oh darling". It's a bit stereotypical, upper-middle-class, speaks good Queen's English and they dress....they wear Jack Wills or Hollister (m UWE w/c)*

# UWE: more mixed, but still gradations

- ▶ Isabel – one of our most clearly w/c students
- ▶ Father decorator, mother dinner lady
- ▶ Her experience had led to lowered expectations
- ▶ *Some people are kind of different to what I'm used to.. They're just sort of like, I don't know, just seem like really well spoken and I'm sort of Bristolian , so I feel a bit inferior to them sometimes.. A lot of them are very confident.. When you're in a group of so many confident outspoken people, it's like ooh a bit intimidating and you think ,oh I don't know , I'm not as good as them and stuff like that.*



# Oscar: m/c class misfit: 'massive sense of underachievement & loss of entitlement

- ▶ *I'm a UWE student who feels like they should be at Bristol if you want to put it that way. I come from a very strong university background. I mean my mother's father was a lecturer at .Cambridge. .. Since I was very very young I learned to look down on an ex-poly before I even knew what it was, you know, oh you don't want to go to an ex-poly.*
- ▶ *I'm academically quite talented, I mean it's not arrogance, it's more just knowing what I'm capable of. It hasn't been helped by going through life being told how good you are.*
- ▶ *I think one of my biggest worries about coming here was my contemporaries which is unfair,... I'd hope to find other people who have kind of fallen from... I'm such a snob! – you know just fallen from perhaps a higher academic level. There's all that stuff, you know, how many people meet their future partner or whatever... And you form these lifelong friends...and I'm going to a uni I've always looked down on.*
- ▶ *I am massively against the private school system, massively, but inevitably I have a lot of friends who went there, you know, just because of the people I got on with.*

# CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ Complex processes of identification and disidentification, reflecting complexity of current class nexus
- ▶ Relational process: identifying ‘Other’ (people who are different) and ‘Similar’ (‘people like me’)
- ▶ UoB and UWE: differing class habitus
  - UoB u/m/c elite, entitlement; isolation of w/c
  - UWE more mixed, but w/c may still feel ‘different’
  - Intermediate class majority plus home for derailed m/c
- ▶ Experience of class difference and manifestation in terms of differing levels of economic, social and cultural capital, may impact on educational progress, leading in extreme cases to drop out, changing courses or lowered ambitions