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Refining childhood social class measures in the 1958 British cohort study

Jane Elliott and Jon Lawrence

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Jane Elliott & Jon Lawrence

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Contact the authors:

Jane Elliott
Institute of Education, University of London
Email: j.elliott@ioe.ac.uk

Jon Lawrence
University of Cambridge
Email: jml55@cam.ac.uk

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Please contact the Centre for Longitudinal Studies.
tel: +44 (0)20 7612 6875
email: clsfeedback@ioe.ac.uk

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Abstract

The aim of this working paper is to set out an approach to classifying the childhood social class of members of the 1958 British birth cohort study. The specific focus is on the use of mother's occupation and household tenure, in addition to father's occupation, in order to create a more meaningful and robust three-category measure of social class that is likely to be of particular utility for those using the newly available qualitative materials now associated with the study. The paper also provides a descriptive insight into the living conditions, during the 1960s, of children from different social classes. By drawing both on the quantitative data collected in 1969, and on retrospective accounts of childhood circumstances collected from cohort members in qualitative interviews in their early fifties, we aim to provide a picture of the diversity of experience of children from different social classes within the cohort.

Non-technical summary

Is it possible to construct a measure of childhood social class that represents the circumstances of children from the 1958 cohort in the late 1960s? To what extent do interviews with cohort members at age fifty provide an insight into individual memories of their childhood circumstances? In this paper we provide some simple analyses to help describe the variation in children's lives alongside extracts from retrospective interviews conducted with a sample of the cohort at age fifty. Our aim is to encourage researchers who want to use a simple classification of household social class to use a measure that includes information about mother's occupation and housing, rather than focusing solely on father's occupation. We provide an appendix, with syntax, to allow other researchers to use the approach we outline here. We also aim to highlight the type of material available in the retrospective interviews to encourage further use of this unique resource for mixed-methods research.

Key findings:

- The majority of mothers – 70% - are recorded as working either when they became pregnant with the cohort child and/or when the child reached age 11 in 1969.
- At age 11, 46% of cohort children were living in owner-occupied accommodation and 42% in housing rented from a local authority.
- 56% of cohort members were sharing a bedroom at age 11, and 12% were living in overcrowded accommodation.
- 11% of mothers reported that the family had experienced severe financial hardship in the last year.
- Despite a clear association between father's social class and tenure, among the children with manual fathers one-third (33.2%) were in owner-occupied accommodation.
- The household measure of social class that we propose has a stronger association with a number of measures of disadvantage (e.g. low income, overcrowding) than a measure based only on coding father's occupation.
- Despite the strong association between household social class and deprivation, the majority of children from working-class households are not classified as experiencing deprivation i.e. those from working-class households are a diverse group.

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Introduction

This is a paper about the most useful ways to classify the childhood social class of individuals surveyed as part of the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS). When seeking to explore the rich longitudinal data associated with national birth cohort studies such as NCDS, social researchers often make use of simple social class variables derived from data collected in childhood in order both to control for social class effects and to present data, especially some of the rich qualitative data now associated with the study, descriptively. In doing so, most rely on the original NCDS class variables based on the coding of father's occupation recorded when the cohort member was a child. This was expressed in terms of the Registrar General's social class categories developed for the decennial census, but with manual and non-manual occupations kept separate at all skill levels. The result is that in 1969, NCDS worked with a seven-point occupational classification for men, compared with the standard five-point Registrar General scale, though many researchers prefer to collapse the NCDS occupational data into a smaller number of classes. In the 1960s and 1970s, research on education sometimes worked with a three-point class scale: non-manual, skilled manual and other manual (Fogelman and Goldstein, 1976; Essen et al, 1978), while for many purposes, and across several different disciplines, researchers have used a four-point class scale (Jefferis et al, 2004; Chan and Boliver, 2013). A few published papers have adopted a simple dichotomous model of manual or non-manual social class based on father's occupation (examples include Fogelman, 1978; Atherton et al, 2008; Draper and Hancock, 2011) this can be due to a focus on a small sub-sample of the cohort e.g. Draper and Hancock's interest in children who have experienced bereavement.

In all these examples the social class of the child's household is determined solely by father's occupation at a given data collection or 'sweep'. In this paper we argue that the original NCDS social class measures can be refined by taking account of other variables recorded by NCDS; namely mother's occupation and housing tenure. These are variables that contemporaries were coming to recognise also played a part in influencing household social class, and which, crucially, we would argue may have played their part in modifying the influence of father's occupation on the home life and experiences of the child who is the subject of the NCDS study. Our aim is to develop a social class measure that is both relevant to debates about social difference that were already taking place in the late 1960s and 1970s and, crucially, better correlated with class-sensitive measures of relative household advantage and disadvantage as measured by other variables within NCDS.

A particular focus of our work is to create a straightforward indicator of childhood social class that can be used when analysing some of the more qualitative materials that are available as part of the NCDS. For example, when the children were aged eleven in 1969 they were asked to write an essay on the topic 'Imagine you are 25...' ⁱ. In addition, the structured interview schedules used to collect information from parents (usually the mother) of members of the cohort during the 1960s included some open-ended questions that elicited more qualitative responses. More recently, biographical interviews have been carried out with a sub-sample of 220 cohort members soon after they turned 50, and, as part of the age 50 paper self-completion questionnaire, cohort members were asked an open-ended question about their imagined life at 60 ⁱⁱ. Thus, although the 1958 British birth cohort is best

known for its detailed quantitative or 'structured' longitudinal data, it also provides researchers with opportunities to conduct more qualitative analysis where easy access to more subtle measures of household social class, but restricted to a few categories, may well prove particularly helpful (Elliott and Morrow 2007; Elliott, 2008; Elliott et al, 2010).

This paper also provides a descriptive insight into the living conditions during the 1960s of children from different social classes. By drawing both on the quantitative data collected in 1969 and on retrospective accounts of childhood circumstances, collected from cohort members in qualitative interviews in their early fifties, we aim to provide a picture of the diversity of experiences of children within the cohort.

Rationale

Although some epidemiologists and others have developed sophisticated models for analysing the direct and indirect influence of social class on children's development by generating composite measures from a broad range of NCDS variables (Sacker, Schoon and Bartley, 2002), researchers still commonly rely on data about father's occupation, coded into social class categories, in order to provide a summary measure of the child's early-life circumstances. There are a number of problems with this approach. First, father's occupation was only one element influencing family living conditions and social life. Mother's employment and occupation could also make an important contribution both in terms of income and through access to social networks and, at least potentially, alternative value systems (Crompton and Mann [eds], 1988; Crompton, 1993; Sørensen, 1994). Second, by the late 1960s social scientists were coming to argue that housing could be as important as occupation in determining systematic differences in lifestyle and life chances in Britain. Some spoke boldly of the emergence of 'housing classes' (Rex and Moore, 1967; Saunders, 1978), but most preferred to stress the contingent, empirical nature of the socio-cultural differences associated with different types of housing tenure (Rose, 1974; Heath, Jowell and Curtice, 1985; Barlow and Duncan, 1988). Third, it is important to recognise the difficulties of assigning social class categories to an entire household from occupational details, particularly when the original data has been collected by a heterogeneous group with no specific training (or experience) in occupational classification. Our motivation for proposing a new approach to the classification of childhood social class for members of the 1958 cohort study is therefore in part to ameliorate the potential unreliability created when father's occupation was originally coded, and also to incorporate other indicators of family social conditions that are recognised to be important.

Here it is important to be aware of the specific circumstances in which data were collected for the 1958 cohort study. At birth, data were collected by the midwife attending the birth using a specially designed questionnaire; at age 7 and 11 information about the child's home life and family circumstances was collected by a local authority health visitor from the parents (but in practice usually from the mother alone) using a structured interview schedule. While for some relatively common and well-known occupations it was straightforward to code them into a social class category e.g. 'head teacher' or 'coal miner' for others such as 'engineer' it would have been much less easy to be sure. In NCDS, some 'engineers' have been coded as Social Class 1 (professional and managerial) who were almost certainly skilled manual workers, given what else we know about their circumstances. Unfortunately

(but understandably given the relative lack of resources then available for large-scale survey research), when the original information was collected it was not all entered into a computer database but rather was coded on paper, so that the data that is readily available to researchers is simply the social class category as assigned in the late 1960s. Given the scope for occupational misclassification, we would argue that it is doubly important to use other information from within the study as a potential correctiveⁱⁱⁱ.

The specific motivation for the current work was to provide a social class categorisation that could be used in the qualitative analysis of children's aspirations as expressed in essays they wrote at age eleven imagining what their lives would be like as adults (at age 25). The focus here is therefore primarily on the information collected at age 11 augmented, where appropriate, with data from earlier sweeps (i.e. birth and age seven). However, future work could usefully extend this analysis to the data collected at age 16.

By using mother's occupation and housing tenure to modify the household social class ascription currently derived solely from father's occupation, we aim to create a composite social class variable which maps more closely on to other social and economic signifiers of class differences. We do not argue that the groups we identify represent absolute class divisions in late sixties Britain. This was a fluid and increasingly diverse society, but it was also one in which life chances remained strongly correlated with social, economic and cultural characteristics conventionally understood in terms of class. Using a range of objective and subjective measures of material deprivation we demonstrate that our modified household class schema for NCDS is more closely correlated with relative advantage and disadvantage than conventional schema based solely on the occupation of male heads of household. Finally, we explore retrospective testimonies about childhood experiences collected from a sub-sample of NCDS cohort members at age 50 in order to flesh out the subjective experience of advantage and disadvantage across different class groups. This is something that is very difficult to do using only the data collected contemporaneously as part of NCDS.

Father's occupational social class when child is aged 11

When the child was aged 11, the mother was interviewed and, inter alia, asked about the occupation of the child's father, or, where applicable, the male head of the household. There were 13,313 (87%)^{iv} children in the age 11 survey whose fathers had classifiable occupations, and these occupations were grouped under seven headings using a modified version of the hierarchically organised Registrar General's social class (RGSC) scale (social classes III and IV were sub-divided into manual and non-manual sub-groups, see Table 1).

Table 1: Social class of father or male head of household in 1969 when cohort members were aged 11 (RGSC, 1966)

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid Social class I	738	5.5
Social class II	2433	18.2
SC III non-man.	1245	9.3
SC III manual	5721	42.8
SC IV non-manual	285	2.1
SC IV manual	2064	15.4
Social class V	827	6.2
Unclassifiable	60	.4
Total	13373	100.0
Missing -1 Not applicable	1963	
Not in survey in 1969	3222	
Total	18558	

Note: Source is NCDS variable n1171

Often this data was the only information used to indicate the social class of the household, and, as noted, in many analyses the data has been further simplified into a dichotomous model based on manual vs. non-manual employment. At age 11, this gives two large social classes: with 4,701 (35.3 per cent) in the non-manual group and 8,612 (64.7 per cent) in the manual. However, it must be doubted whether families with heads in routine non-manual and service occupations (RGSC III[a] and IV[a]) really had more in common with RGSC I & II (professional, managerial and administrative) families than with families headed by manual workers (especially those in RGSC III[b] – the skilled manual workers). On almost all the key measures of social disadvantage, families coded as RGSC III(a) and RGSC IV(a) in the age 11 sweep of NCDS fall almost midway between families coded as RGSC I & II and *all* manual workers' families (Table 2).

Table 2: Measures of advantage/disadvantage at age 11 (NCDS sweep 2), percentage of valid cases within each social group

	I & II	IIIa & IVa	IIIb, IVb & V
Child does not share bedroom	58.6	50.2	37.3
Mother 'very satisfied' with accommodation	73.5	64.6	55.3
Low income	3.4	9.6	15.9
Serious financial hardship in previous year	3.5	9.0	13.6
Overcrowding (>1.5 persons/room)	2.7	7.9	16.3

Note: Low income = free school meals or supplementary benefit claimed at age 11. This measure was used by Wedge and Prosser in their original 1973 report 'Born to Fail?' As they note, it is likely to be an underestimate of low income given the stigma attached to claiming benefits.

The distinctive circumstances and life chances of different grades of non-manual or 'service' labour has long been recognised. Indeed it forms a central part of the rationale of the more sophisticated approach to occupational class developed by John Goldthorpe to study social mobility in the 1970s and 1980s (Goldthorpe, 1980; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1988). Goldthorpe's scheme preserves the manual/non-manual distinction, but it recognises five different grades of non-manual occupation: higher service (I), lower service (II), routine non-manual (III), petty bourgeois (IV – i.e. shopkeepers, self-employed etc.) and supervisory (V) (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993). These five classes are often collapsed into two main blocks: the service class (I & II) and the intermediate class (III, IV & V), with manual employees comprising the third class block (Saunders, 1990). The occupational data from the age 11 sweep of NCDS does not provide sufficient information about conditions of employment to allocate individuals with any certainty to the full seven-point Goldthorpe class schema, but it is possible to make an approximate allocation from the existing RGSC data to the simplified three-class version of Goldthorpe's model. In this three class model, which we will call 'Father's Social Class', we would therefore have a 'service class' comprising RGSC I & II and representing 23.8 per cent of the children in NCDS sweep 2 (3,171), an 'intermediate class' of more routine service occupations comprising RGSC III[a] & RGSC IV[a] representing 11.5 per cent of the children (1,530), and a 'working class' classified as above to include all those in manual occupations (i.e. RGSC III[b], RGSC IV[b] and RGSC V) and representing 64.7 per cent of the children (8,612).

Though preferable to the simple two-class model, this variable still has a number of disadvantages. First, applied to the 1969 data it gives a rather small intermediate class (though it would not do so if used on twenty-first century occupational data for the UK). Second, it still derives social class entirely from the male head's occupation. Third, it fetishises the manual/non-manual divide in ways that, as we demonstrate, actually reduce the association between class and social disadvantage.

Building on the arguments of Goldthorpe and Lockwood that post-war social and economic change was leading to a growing 'convergence' of routine non-manual and affluent manual workers' lifestyles by the 1960s (Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, Platt, 1969, p. 26-7), Ray Pahl developed the idea of a 'middle mass,' perhaps two-thirds of the population, which included most of those conventionally thought of as lower middle class and upper working class (Pahl, 1984; Pahl and Wallace, 1988). We don't go quite that far – our alternative intermediate group, which uses information on housing tenure and mother's occupation to modify social class categories derived from the male head's occupation, represents just over one-third of households in the 1969 sweep of NCDS. However, like Pahl, we argue that male manual workers' families are not necessarily *all* best coded as 'working class' if we want to develop meaningful social class variables with the greatest possible utility.

Incorporating mother's occupation

Information was collected about the cohort members' mothers' occupations at conception ('Mother's main job when starting this baby' - variable name N539) and at age eleven ('Mother's most recent work by socio-economic group' - variable name N1225). At birth, mothers' occupations have been coded into 18 main categories, with a total of 6,681 mothers recorded as in employment (Table 3) i.e. around a third of those in the study. Of these, the largest group were coded as being clerks or typists (1,559, 23.3 per cent), with the second largest groups being 'others in social class IV' (988, 14%) and shop assistants or hairdressers (799, 4.3%). Clearly many women were not working when they became pregnant, and so for many women there is no information about their occupation at this stage.

Table 3: 'Mother's main job when starting this baby' and SEG (GRO 1966) (N539)

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	1 Teachers	269	4.0
	2 Nurses qualified	92	1.4
	3 Bank clerks etc	246	3.7
	4 Shopkeepers etc	60	.9
	5 Others in SCI,II	101	1.5
	6 Nurses- not qual	109	1.6
	7 Clerks, typists	1559	23.3
	8 Shop asst, hairdr	799	12.0
	9 Garment workers	152	2.3
	10 Textile wkr skld	281	4.2
	11 Personal service	224	3.4
	12 Others in SC III	553	8.3
	13 Machinists	287	4.3
	14 Textile wkr SCIV	104	1.6
	15 Personal-SCIV	379	5.7
	16 Others in SC IV	988	14.8
	17 Textile-labourer	356	5.3
	18 Personal-SC V	122	1.8
	Total	6681	100.0
Missing	-1 NA not working	10734	
	Not in birth survey	1143	
	Total	11877	
Total		18558	

In 1969, when the cohort members were eleven, mothers were asked about their current or most recent occupation and this was coded using the 1966 General Register Office's socio-economic group classification. This results in a variable with ten main categories and an eleventh for inadequate information. At age 11, information is recorded for a total of 8,411 (55%) mothers with a current or recent occupation (Table 4). The largest group was 'manual workers' (2,839 or 33.8%), and there were also concentrations of mothers working in 'personal service' (1,785 or 21.2%) and 'typist/clerical' occupations (1,308 or 15.6%).

Table 4 Mother's main job in 1969 (n1225)

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid 1 Prof, managerial	268	3.2
2 Intermed non-man	798	9.5
3 Typist, clerical	1308	15.6
4 Shop assistant	839	10.0
5 Telephonists etc	183	2.2
6 Personal service	1785	21.2
7 Forewomen, manual	124	1.5
8 Manual workers	2839	33.8
9 Own account	70	.8
10 Farm workers	148	1.8
11 Inadequate info	49	.6
Total	8411	100.0
Missing -1 NA, Never worked	6925	
Not in age 11 survey	3222	
Total	18558	

Although there is a question at age seven about whether the mother has worked since the child was born, no information was collected about occupation or type of work at this stage (the question appears to have been shaped by debates about maternal deprivation, rather than about the need to refine measures of social class). Age seven data is therefore not included in the current analysis.

In total there are 14,573 (95%) mothers surveyed in 1969 who have information about their employment status recorded either at the cohort member's birth (referring to the time the mother got pregnant) or when the cohort member was aged 11. Of these 14,573 cases, 4,422 were recorded as not having worked at either point, but the majority (70%) have at least one occupational classification recorded.

Two dichotomous variables were created to indicate whether the mother was in a manual occupation when she became pregnant with the cohort member, and whether the mother was recorded as having a manual occupation at age 11. At pregnancy, manual occupations were classified as including 'garment workers', 'skilled textile workers', 'machinists', 'textile workers social class IV', 'others in social class IV', 'textile labourers' and those in 'personal services social class V'. In total there were 2,290 women in manual occupations when they got pregnant, i.e. 34.3 per cent of those recorded as working.

At age 11, manual occupations were classified as including 'forewoman, manual', 'manual workers' and 'farm workers'. There were a total of 3,111 women classified as 'manual' when the child was aged 11, i.e. 37.0 per cent of those women recorded as having an occupation. Using these two dichotomous variables, a total of 4,698 women were classified as manual either at pregnancy or at the age 11 data collection. It is noteworthy that only a relatively small proportion of mothers (703, or less than 10%) were in manual occupations at both time points.

As we would expect there is a strong association between father's social class and whether the mother has ever been recorded as doing a manual occupation, such that among 'service class' fathers at age 11, 301 (9.5%) had a wife recorded as ever having a manual occupation, among intermediate fathers the number was 334 (21.8%), and among manual fathers 3,304 (38.4%). However, despite this strong association there is clearly evidence of considerable numbers of cross-class families (Table 4)^v. By contrast, the likelihood of the mother having done a non-manual occupation either just prior to the birth or when the child was age 11 was less closely associated with father's social class, with 3,781 (43.9 per cent) of mothers in houses headed by a manual worker having done a non-manual job, compared with 1,787 (56.4%) with service class and 923 (60.3%) with intermediate class husbands/partners.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation of father’s 3-way social class with whether mother ever held manual job

Father’s Social Class		Mother ever having had a manual job		Total
		Yes	No	
Service Class	Count	301	2870	3171
	%	9.5%	90.5%	100.0%
Intermediate	Count	334	1196	1530
	%	21.8%	78.2%	100.0%
Manual	Count	3304	5308	8612
	%	38.4%	61.6%	100.0%
Total	Count	3939	9374	13313
	%	29.6%	70.4%	100.0%

Tenure of accommodation when child is aged 11

There were 13,800 (90%) children for whom we have information about the tenure of their accommodation at age 11. Of these, nearly a half (6,320 or 45.8%) were living in owner occupied accommodation, with slightly fewer (5,756 or 41.7%) living in housing rented from the local council. A minority were either in private rented accommodation (1,037 or 5.5%), tied (i.e. employer owned) accommodation (649 or 3.5%) or some other accommodation (38 or 0.2%).

As would be expected there was a strong association between the social class of the father’s occupation and tenure. Among ‘service class’ fathers, 76.8 per cent were living in owner-occupied accommodation, among intermediate fathers the figure was 58.5 per cent, and for manual fathers 33.2 per cent (Table 6). However, despite this strong association, it is still notable that among the children with ‘service class’ fathers as many as 11.5 per cent (363) were living in rented council housing, and conversely among the children with manual fathers as many as 33.2 per cent were in owner-occupied accommodation. As discussed above, this raises questions about the approach of only using father’s occupation to provide an indication of a child’s social class background. We can, for example, identify a group of 548 children (i.e. approximately 4% of the total sample at age 11) with fathers in manual occupations, and mothers who are either not working or who are in *non-manual* occupations, and who are living in owner occupied accommodation with *six or more* rooms (not including kitchen and bathroom). Using standard or traditional classification approaches these children would be treated as ‘working class’ however they are clearly living in households that have considerable material resources and arguably also some important cross-class social and cultural influences.

Table 6: Cross-tabulation of tenure of accommodation with 3-way father's social class

Father's social class	Tenure of accommodation at 11 in 1969 (n1152)						Total
	1 Owner occupier	2 Council rented	3 Private rented unfurnished	4 Private rented furnished	5 Tied	6 Other	
Service Class							
Count	2428	363	117	9	117	7	3161
%	76.8%	11.5%	5.6%	.3%	5.6%	.2%	100%
Intermediate							
Count	891	440	89	10	92	2	1524
%	58.5%	28.9%	5.8%	.7%	6.0%	.1%	100%
Manual							
Count	2852	4723	628	58	306	20	8587
%	33.2%	55.0%	7.3%	.7%	3.6%	.2%	100%
Total							
Count	6171	5526	894	77	575	29	13272
%	46.5%	41.6%	6.7%	.6%	4.3%	.2%	100%

Creating a composite household social class variable

In order to classify children into three different social class groups at age 11, making use of information about their father's occupation, their mother's occupation and the tenure of their accommodation, the following procedure was followed (see Table 6):

- 1) Children were classified as 'middle class' if their father was in RGSC class I or II at the age 11 sweep (professional, managerial, administrative etc.) and they were *not* living in rented council accommodation and their mother was *not* classified as being in a manual occupation either when she became pregnant or when the child was aged 11.
- 2) Children were classified as 'intermediate' class if their father was in RGSC class I or II but they were either living in council accommodation or their mother was classified as being in a manual occupation either when she became pregnant or when the child was aged 11. Children were also classified as 'intermediate' if their father was in RGSC class III[a] (routine non-manual). In addition, children were classified as being in the intermediate class if their father was in a manual occupation at age 11, or in social class IV[a] (routine service), but they were living in owner-occupied accommodation.
- 3) Children were classified as 'Working class' if their fathers were in manual occupations **or** in social class IV[a] (routine service) and they were *not* living in owner-occupied accommodation at age 11.

The SPSS syntax used to create this variable is provided in Appendix 1.

This new composite household social class variable results in 2,599 children (19.6%) in the 'middle class', 4,767 children (35.9%) in the 'intermediate' class and 5,911 children (44.5%) in the 'working class'. It also means that no child in the 'working class' is living in owner-occupied accommodation, and no child in the 'middle-class' is living in council accommodation or has a mother in a manual occupation. A cross-tabulation of this new composite *household* social class variable with a variable based solely on the social class of the father shows that there is considerable overlap between the two classifications. However, approximately 18 per cent of children (564) with fathers coded as in RGSC I and II occupations have been moved from the service class into the intermediate class, 33.2 per cent of children (2,852) with manual fathers, who would normally be classified as 'working class', have been moved into the intermediate class, and 11.5 per cent of children (176) with fathers coded as in RGSC IV[a] (routine service) occupations, who were not owner occupiers, have been moved into the 'working class' (Table 7).

One argument against using mother's occupation to help determine household social class is that it is a somewhat fluid measure that will change over time as mothers drop in and out of the labour force, and the decision about mother's work may depend on the family's desire for a better lifestyle. However, we have deliberately chosen here to take account of mother's occupation both at birth and in the years leading up to the survey in 1969. In addition, mother's occupation is only used to modify social class as defined by the father's occupation so that, for example, households are only moved from the 'middle class' category to the 'intermediate' category if a woman was in a manual job – either when she became pregnant or in the years before the age 11 survey. It should also be noted that each social class grouping will include children with working mothers and with non-working mothers.

Table 7: Cross-tabulation of household social class at age 11 with 3-way father's social class

Father's social class		Household social class at age 11			Total
		Middle	Intermediate	Working	
Service Class	Count	2599	564	0	3163
	%	82.2%	17.8%	0.0%	100.0%
Intermediate	Count	0	1351	176	1527
	%	0.0%	88.5%	11.5%	100%
Manual	Count	0	2852	5735	8587
	%	0.0%	33.2%	66.8%	100%
Total	Count	2599	4767	5911	13277
	%	19.6%	35.9%	44.5%	100.0%

Social class and its association with other key variables

Our argument is that refining the social class variables available for NCDS in this way will provide a more robust indicator of households' relative social advantage and disadvantage than relying solely on the single variable of father's social class. A set of analyses was therefore carried out to compare the association of the two different three-category measures of social class (i.e. father's social class and the new household composite social class measure) with a small set of variables from the age 11 sweep of the study that relate to actual and perceived material disadvantage. We chose three objective measures and two that relied on reported hardship and dissatisfaction, all collected at age 11 in 1969. The variables chosen were:

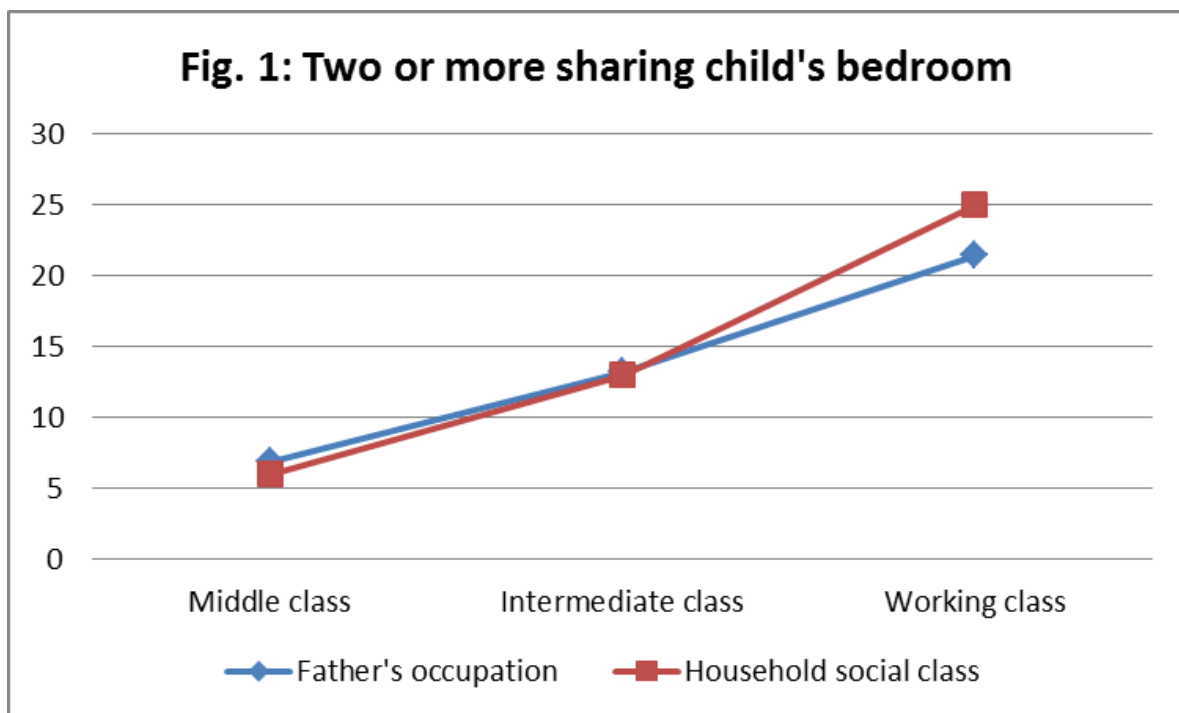
- 1) number of children sharing the child's bedroom (variable name: n1157)
- 2) level of overcrowding in the household (variable name: n1683)
- 3) whether the family was on low income (as defined by receiving either free school meals or supplementary benefit variable names: n1229 & n1176 to n1180)
- 4) whether the family had experienced serious financial hardship in the last year (variable name: n1230)
- 5) whether the mother is satisfied with present home (variable name: n1164).

In the following section we examine the relationship between social class as it is traditionally measured (i.e. focusing only on father's occupation) and each of these five variables and

compare this with analysis of the association between our new 'composite social class' measure and each variable.

Number sharing child's bedroom when child is aged 11

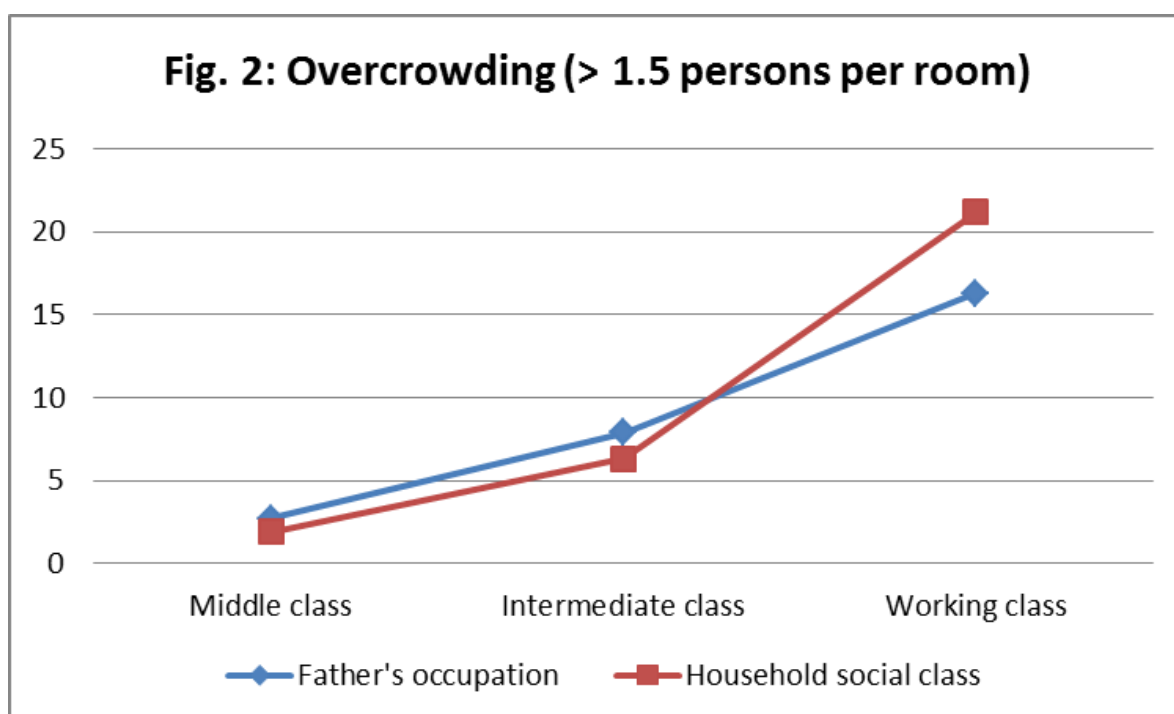
There are 13,585 (89%) children for whom we have information about how many people were sharing their bedroom at age 11. Of these nearly a half (5,936 or 43.7%) had a bedroom of their own, while 5,330 (39%) shared with one other person and the remaining 2,319 (17.1%) were sharing with two or more other people. As would be predicted, there was a strong association between the social class of the father's occupation and number of people sharing the child's bedroom. Among children with 'service class' fathers only 6.9 per cent shared their bedroom with two or more people, among those with 'intermediate' fathers the figure was 13.2 per cent and for those with 'manual' fathers the figure rose to 21.4 per cent. The Cramer's V statistic provides a useful summary measure of the strength of association between two categorical variables (it takes values between 0 and 1, with 1 indicating perfect association) and in this case the Cramer's V was 0.149. If the same analysis is carried out, but using our new composite measure of household social class, we find a slightly stronger association. The corresponding figures are six per cent for middle-class households, 13 per cent for intermediate households and 25 per cent for manual households (Figure 1). The Cramer's V in this analysis rises to 0.180.



Overcrowding

A measure of overcrowding was derived by taking into account the number of rooms reported to be available to the household and the number of individuals in the household. This resulted in a variable (n 1683 - number of persons per room) with four categories (up to 1 person per room, 1 to 1.5 persons per room, over 1.5 to 2 persons per room, over 2

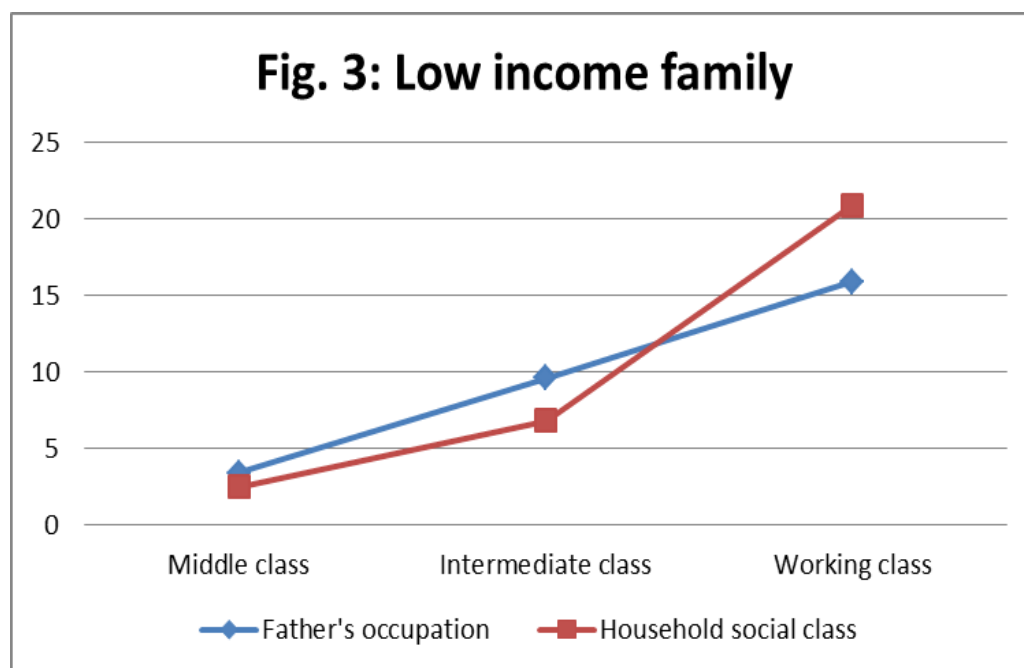
persons per room). There are 13,793 (90%) cases with data available for this variable and for simplicity it was dichotomised so that those children living in households with over 1.5 persons per room were considered to be in overcrowded conditions (12.1% in total). This measure parallels that used by Wedge and Prosser in their 1973 report on disadvantaged children in the cohort. As they state, 'our definition of overcrowding is quite stringent since it implies that a husband, wife and four children could occupy a living room, dining-kitchen and two bedrooms and just fail to be overcrowded' (Wedge and Prosser, 1973 p. 14). This measure of overcrowding was strongly associated with social class measured using father's occupation (2.7% children with service class fathers; 7.9% of children with 'intermediate' fathers and 16.3% of children with manual fathers were in overcrowded conditions - Cramer's $V=0.179$). Using the new composite measure of household social class there is an even stronger association (the corresponding percentages are: 1.9% for middle class households; 6.3% for intermediate households and 21.2 per cent for working class households, Cramer's $V=0.256$ [Figure 2]).



Family on a low income

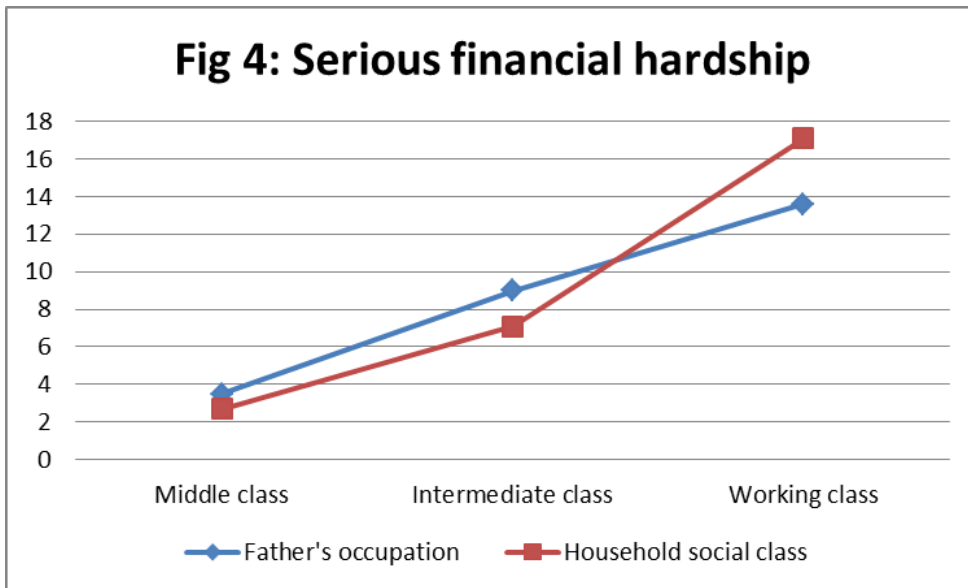
There are 13,629 (89%) children for whom we have information about whether any child in the family was receiving free school meals. Of these in only 1,422 cases (10.4%) was it reported that a member of the family was entitled to free school meals. An *additional* 407 children were not receiving free school meals but were in a family in receipt of supplementary benefit (there were 1,049 children living in families receiving supplementary benefit). In total, there were therefore 1,829 children (13.4%) living in low-income families. As stressed by Wedge and Prosser (1973) these figures are likely to underestimate those with low incomes because families often failed to take up benefits. For example, a government report showed that in 1966 free school meals were received by only a third of eligible children with fathers in full-time work (Ministry of Social Security [1967] *Circumstances of families*, London H.M.S.O.).

Once again this indicator of disadvantage was strongly associated with social class measured using father's occupation (3.4% for children with service class fathers; 9.6% for children with intermediate fathers; 15.9% for children with working-class fathers - Cramer's $V= 0.161$). However if the analysis is repeated using the new composite household social class variable the strength of the relationship again increases (2.5% for children from middle-class households; 6.8% for children from intermediate households; and 20.9% for children from working class households - Cramer's $V=0.241$) [Figure 3].



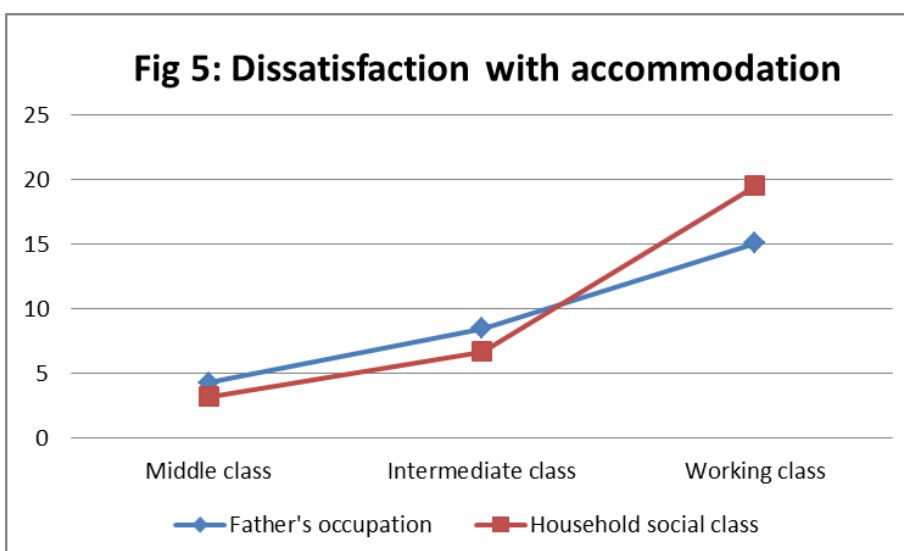
Serious financial hardship

As part of the age 11 sweep of the NCDS, the parental interview (usually with the mother) included the question 'Have you been seriously troubled by financial hardship in the last 12 months?'. There is available data for 13,709 (89%) cases and of these 1,518 (11.1%) stated that they had indeed experienced serious financial hardship. This measure of household difficulties is again strongly associated with social class derived using father's occupation (3.5% of children with service class fathers, 9.0% children with intermediate fathers and 13.6% of children with manual fathers were reported to be in households that had experienced serious financial hardship over the past year; Cramer's $V=0.139$). But again when applying the new composite household social class variable we find an even stronger association with this subjective measure of financial hardship. Using the new measure, the figures for each social class group reporting serious financial hardship were: 2.7 per cent of middle-class households, 7.1 per cent of intermediate households and 17.1 per cent of working class households, (Cramer's $V=0.195$) [Figure 4].



Maternal dissatisfaction with accommodation

A more subjective indicator of disadvantage is provided by the mother's reported satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the family's accommodation when the cohort child was aged 11. In total 13,795 (90%) mothers responded to this question and the majority (86.6%) reported that they were very satisfied, of fairly satisfied. The focus here is on the 12 per cent who were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied (just 103 [0.6 per cent] had 'no feelings'). There was a strong association between dissatisfaction with accommodation and father's social class (4.3% of children with service class fathers, 8.5% of children with intermediate fathers and 15.1% of children with manual fathers had mothers who reported dissatisfaction with accommodation; Cramer's $V=0.144$). However, when applying the new composite household social class variable, we find a substantially stronger association with this subjective indicator of disadvantage. Using the new measure the figures for each social class group reporting dissatisfaction with accommodation were: 3.2 per cent of middle-class households, 6.7 per cent of intermediate households and 19.5 per cent of working class households, (Cramer's $V=0.220$) [Figure 5].



Summary: Social class and measures of deprivation

In summary, we find that for each of the five variables selected to indicate actual or perceived material deprivation at age 11, the NCDS data demonstrate a stronger association with the new composite measure of household social class than with social class measured using only father's occupation. In addition, the use of this alternative *household*-based measure of social class includes an intermediate category that is both considerably larger than that derived from using only father's social class (36.2% compared with 11.5%), and also somewhat closer to the securely middle-class category on most key measures of deprivation, despite the fact that we have added almost one third of the households conventionally categorised as 'working class' (itself a significant indictment of the absurdity of fetishising the manual/non-manual divide). In other words, our proposed new composite measure of social class more clearly identifies those in the sample who are working class and most likely to be living in overcrowded and unsatisfactory housing.

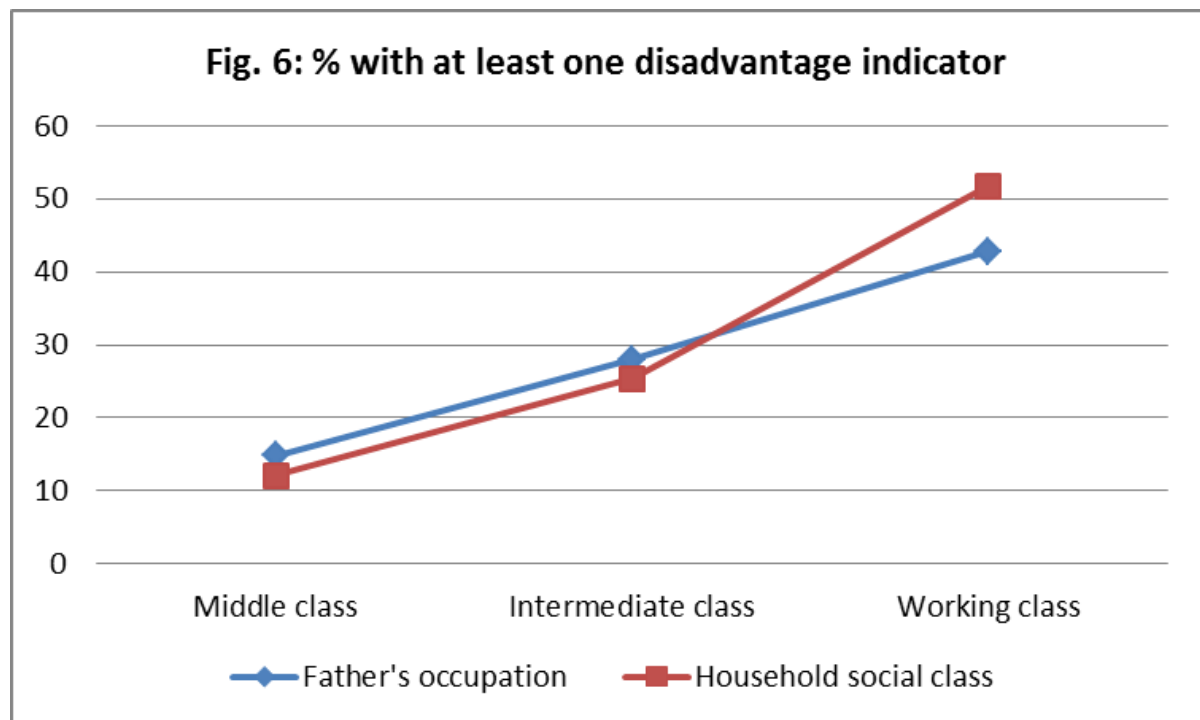
It is also worth noting that for each of the measures of material disadvantage examined above, the majority of children from working-class households are not classified as experiencing deprivation. In other words, although children from working-class households were significantly and substantially more likely than those from middle- and intermediate-class households to be in a low income family or to be reported as suffering serious financial hardship, the majority of children from working-class households were not recorded as experiencing these difficulties at the age 11 sweep. One interpretation is that, whereas the middle-class group could be seen as a relatively homogeneous group in relation to these measures of material disadvantage, with only a tiny fraction (i.e. typically less than 5%) reporting any disadvantage, the working-class group remains much more heterogeneous, even after a substantial minority of owner-occupiers has been re-assigned to the intermediate class, with between 16 and 25 per cent reporting each disadvantage (though, as noted, this is likely to be an under-estimation of the extent of disadvantage because of under-reporting).

In order to explore this in more detail, a composite measure of disadvantage was created that provided a sum of the total number of 'disadvantages' reported to be experienced by the family. This measure had a maximum of five if the family was reported to have experienced all of the five difficulties discussed above and a minimum of zero if none of the material difficulties were reported. Analysis was restricted to the sample of 13,021 cohort members with complete data on each of the potential difficulties/material disadvantages. Of these, 64.8 per cent experienced no difficulties, 18.0 per cent experienced one difficulty, 9.3 per cent experienced two difficulties and 7.8 per cent experienced three, four or five (Table 8). As would be expected from the analyses reported above, the composite household measure of social class was more strongly associated than social class based only on father's occupation with this aggregate measure of disadvantage. But what is also important to stress is that among the working-class group (defined using the composite household social class measure), nearly half the sample (48.3%) did not have any of these indicators of disadvantage recorded in the data (Figure 6). Once again this underlines the heterogeneity of those children classified as 'working class' in terms of their experience of material disadvantage. We would not, however, recommend seeking to create a further sub-class

such as 'disadvantaged working class.' Arguably, what was defined as being working-class in 1960s Britain was not so much disadvantage as the disproportionate risk of disadvantage – it is this risk that we would argue is better captured by our composite measure of household social class, than by a more traditional model derived solely from father's occupation. Indeed further analysis could examine total childhood experience of disadvantage.

Table 8: Number of problems experienced by the household at age 11

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
.00	8434	64.8	64.8
1.00	2347	18.0	82.8
2.00	1213	9.3	92.1
Valid 3.00	644	4.9	97.1
4.00	262	2.0	99.1
5.00	121	.9	100.0
Total	13021	100.0	



Exploring retrospective accounts of childhood experiences

Finally we focus a little more closely on how a small sub-sample of cohort members, interviewed in depth in their early 50s remembered their childhood family life. We first look at those squarely from middle-class or working-class households and examine how some of them recalled childhood experiences of advantage or disadvantage. We then present testimony from a number of panel members whose class ascription at age 11 had been altered by using the new composite household class variable. It is important to be clear that the aim here is not to try systematically to validate our suggested household class variable, but rather to provide some insights into how cohort members remembered their childhoods as a way of augmenting the quantitative descriptors of social disadvantage. As part of the lengthy biographical interviews, panel members were asked specifically about how they currently saw themselves in class terms, but it is important to stress that only a minority went on to make comparisons, explicit or implicit, with their childhood experiences of social class.

The use of this material highlights the potential for further research to combine both qualitative and quantitative materials from the 1958 cohort study. However it also suggests the possibility for future studies to collect qualitative descriptions of family life and household circumstances during childhood – either from cohort members themselves or from their parents. Whereas in this paper we are limited to presenting *prospectively* collected quantitative material alongside *retrospective* qualitative material, future studies could be designed to provide prospectively collected qualitative material.

Turning first to respondents who had lived in securely middle-class homes at age 11, we found an interesting awareness of both relative advantage and class identity. Case P439, a man from north-west England whose mother had been recorded as in a ‘professional managerial’ occupation at conception, was clear that he had always felt himself to be ‘middle class’:

I think that might be perhaps the boarding school influence really as much as anything. I've always thought of myself as middle--, middle class--, I suppose as time goes--, I always thought I was middle to upper

Case P601, a man from a securely middle-class Scottish home, was no less emphatic about his middle-class status as a child: ‘I think in those days it was much simpler. You were either upper class, working class or middle class. And yeah, very definitely slap, bang, middle class.’ When asked ‘How did you get that sense?’ he explained:

My dad was a company director, we had a nice house, I went to a grammar school, and we had nice holidays. My dad had--, my dad had a company car, and my mum had a company car.’

However, he was equally clear that it was only as a young adult, coming into contact with the ‘real world’ as he put it, that he fully appreciated the full extent of his advantages compared with most of the population.

Case P489, also from Scotland, had a very similar recollection of domestic comfort that he only understood in class terms later in life:

I think that probably because my mother and father were fairly well off, I don't think it was ever something that was--, it never cropped up so it was never kind of seen as a--, we never wanted for anything, well you wanted toys, you always wanted toys, everyone wants more toys but, aye, everything that we would want, certainly my sister and myself as kids it was always there.

When we looked at the recollections of people who had grown up in solidly working-class families we found few respondents proclaiming a comparable innocence about class difference as a child. Perhaps the closest parallel was Case P249, a woman from Scotland, whose clear sense of working-class identity – ‘that’s what I was born into’ – came not from childhood experiences, but from the social awakening brought on by joining the police in her late teens. There are also some parallels in Case P566, a man from Scotland who repeatedly insisted that he had never thought about class at all. When pressed about his childhood this man readily accepted that their family had been ‘poorer class’, but this was understood in domestic rather than societal terms: his father ‘earned good money’ but they still ‘struggled ... financially’ because of his mother’s drinking problem.

All the other testimonies about working-class childhood that we examined appeared to be unambiguously stamped by a perception of social disadvantage, and in many cases by Richard Sennett’s ‘hidden injuries of class’. Case P378, a woman from the south-east, recalled the ritual humiliation of poverty played out weekly in her school classroom:

a big thing at school for me was, we used to have free school dinners and I can always remember having--, at the beginning of every week we used to go--, being called up in the front of the class being given these discs which meant that we got free school dinners. ... if you were in a lower class group you were--, you were given the discs at the beginning of the week and everybody knew that your parents--, you were on benefits.

Case P115, another woman from the south-east, recalled being ‘very poor’ as a child -- she was one of seven children – and illustrated this by telling a story of how she sat through a meal without eating when taken to a restaurant by another family because her friend’s spiteful brother had told her she’d have to pay her way. Other respondents from working-class backgrounds were equally clear about their relative poverty, even if they had less vivid stories with which to illustrate it. One recalled being ‘very poor because we had nothing’ (Case P498), another simply said ‘I always remember being quite poor’ (Case P378).

Finally, we looked at testimonies which touched on the childhood experiences of a range of people moved into our enlarged intermediate class, firstly focussing on those ‘demoted’ from the middle class category because either they lived in a council house at age 11 or their mother was working in a manual occupation. Case P426 was particularly interesting, because he described his father as working for the local authority as a manager in a department doing accounts and his mother as working as a nurse, but when asked about his consciousness of social class in childhood he explained:

I was very conscious of class when I was a child, because my parents were working class parents and certainly their parents were definitely working class parents, so it was that sort of post war--, [Yeah] And they were able to move on a bit, they pushed on a bit certainly from where they came from, but they both had real working class backgrounds. And I went to--, I passed the 11+, so, and it was in a little town, so I went to the grammar school. There was only a small number of kids from our town went to the grammar school 'cause most of the school was all boarding school, and so there was a lot of--, you were made to feel like, you know, you shouldn't be there, that sort of thing.

Case P696, said much less about her childhood experiences, but was nonetheless clear that she understood her own life in terms of 'coming out of [the] working class' even though her father had had a non-manual job.

When we looked at cases 'promoted' from working to intermediate class because the family were owner occupiers, or because the mother had a non-manual occupation, it was striking how often childhood class was recalled through the lens of gender. Case P161, a man from the south-east, whose mother was in a non-manual occupation and whose family were owner occupiers, was perhaps the most striking example. Having grown up in a politically divided household where party politics and class identity were indivisible, this man still thought in these terms in the 2000s, despite decades of class 'dealignment' (Särilvik and Crewe, 1983; Rose and McAllister, 1986). When asked if he felt he belonged to a social class *now*, he replied:

From a background--, I came from a home that had one person who was Conservative and one person that was Labour, politically. ... So we didn't really talk about it much. Then I suppose I tend to err on my dad's side, he being Labour and mum being much more pro-Tories...

Another individual from this group, Case P025, described a childhood living at his 'gran's' and fondly remembered that he could 'disappear into the fields all day and then wander back in the afternoon for some food' when asked: 'When you were growing up, did you think of yourself as being in any particular social class?' he gave a response that indicated an understanding that the occupations of other female relatives could contribute to social class identity, and indeed underlines the importance of social networks and place as elements that can shape the experiences of childhood:

Yeah. Probably as a kid, I thought working class, mainly because of what my father did and things like that, yeah. [Yeah] But my Gran--, I suppose she'd have classified herself as servant class because that's what she was before she went--, got married in the war and my auntie was, well, governess class. She looked after the little girl of the family that owned the village, which is why I was allowed to wander everywhere.

Similarly, another individual moved from the working to intermediate class category in our classification, Case P268, a divorced man from the north-west whose mother had done a manual job at both the birth and age 11 sweeps of the NCDS but whose family were owner occupiers, appeared hesitant about claiming a working-class identity in the present because

of a strong sense of dis-identification with what being 'working-class' had meant to his father. He commented:

My dad was definitely working class. My dad's life was just working and going down to his local club. Basically my mother brought me up, but they were married. I don't think it was the normal thing to get divorced in--, in the olden days. I didn't dislike my dad and he worked hard, but it was always my mum I was close to, it was always my mum that bought me things and leave things for me.

It's a comment that nicely captures the inherent problems of seeing the household solely through the lens of the male breadwinner.

Examining the testimonies collected from panel member at age 50 confirms Mike Savage's arguments about the strong association in English culture between claims to working-classness and claims to be 'ordinary' and indifferent to class distinctions (Savage, 2005 and 2010). But beneath that veneer, which in some respects might be seen as a product of the class dynamics of the social science interview (Lawrence, 2014), we also gain important insights into panel members' retrospective perception of their own childhoods. It is striking that most of those demoted from 'middle' to 'intermediate' class, not only dis-identify with middle classness in the present, but also recall a rather liminal experience of class in childhood, whilst a minority look back on their childhood as having been unambiguously 'working class' and defined by relative deprivation. Here, the realignment of ascribed social class appears fully justified. But what about those families moved into the intermediate class from the working class. Here the evidence is much less clear cut. Indeed, if class identification is what matters, almost all of these respondents would appear to belong more naturally in a large working-class grouping (as they do in the Goldthorpe schema), rather than in a more liminal class group defined by property owning and cross-class domestic influences. In this sense one might want to think of the intermediate class as 'advantaged working class' rather than 'not working class', but we would argue that it still helps to recognise this relative advantage in our class schema.

This attention to retrospective qualitative testimony therefore helped to reinforce the conclusions from our quantitative analysis that the new household measure of social class offered a closer association with the distribution of material advantage and disadvantage within the population than the alternative social class measures available within the NCDS data. It also underlines that in retrospective accounts of childhood, social class is not solely spoken about of in terms of father's occupation. We do not argue that these three groups represented distinct, hermetically sealed, social blocs in late 1960s Britain. The incidence of disadvantage among intermediate and even middle class groups reminds us that these remain heuristic distinctions made to approximate to the overall distribution of social, economic and cultural capital within society. However, we have no doubt that the new composite household class variable more accurately reflects the diversity of the NCDS children's experiences than measures that rely solely on classifying their fathers' occupations.

Appendix 1

SPSS syntax for creating the new composite household social class variable for sweep 2 (age 11) of NCDS

```
***Based on data from NCDS sweeps 0-3

*** Recoding father's social class at age 11 (1969) into three key
groups

compute paclass11 =-1.

recode n1171 (1 2=1) (3 4 5=2) (6 7=3) (8=-1) into paclass11.

variable labels paclass11 "'Father's social class when child 11
MIW".
Value labels paclass11 1 'Middle' 2 'Intermediate' 3 'Working'.

freq vars n1171 paclass11.

*** Examining mother's occupation
*** aim is to identify mothers who have ever been in a manual job
i.e. when starting for the baby
*** or in most recent job when child aged 11

missing values n539 n1225 ().

frequencies vars n539 n1225.

crosstabs tables=n539 by n1225.

recode n539 (9 10 12 13 14 16 17 18=1) (else=2) into maman0.

freq vars maman0.

recode n1225 (7 8 10=1) (else=2) into maman11.

freq vars=maman11.

variable labels maman0 'Mother manual occ at birth' maman11 ' Mother
manual occ at age 11'.
value labels maman0 maman11 1 'yes' 2 'no'.

crosstabs tables=maman0 by maman11.
```

```

compute maevman=2.

if maman0=1 or maman11=1 maevman=1.

variable labels maevman ' Mother ever manual job?'.

value labels maevman 1 'yes' 2 'no'.

*** Checking derivation of variable

freq vars maevman.

CROSSTABS TABLES n1171 by maevman maman0 maman11
/cel=row cou.

CROSSTABS TABLES paclass11 by maman11
/cel=row cou.

missing values paclass11 (-1).

compute paclass11t=paclass11*10.
compute jsclass11=paclass11t +maman11.

freq vars jsclass11.

crosstabs tables=jsclass11 by n1151 n1152 n1156 n1164
/cel=row cou.

*** Creating variables indicating housing tenure at 11

recode n1152 (1=1) (2 3 4 5 6=2) into ownoccl1.
recode n1152 (2=1) (1 3 4 5 6=2) into council1.

variable labels ownoccl1 "Owner occupied house at 11"
council1 'Council house at 11'.

value labels ownoccl1 council1 1 'Yes' 2 'No'.

freq vars ownoccl1 council1.

*** checking housing tenure by father's social class

crosstabs tables = paclass11 by ownoccl1 council1
/cel=row cou.

*** creating new three category social class variable

```

```
*** taking account of fathers occupation, mother's occupation and
housing
*** version with housing being more important
*** aim is to reduce size of intermediate group

compute HHsc11a=-1.

variable labels HHsc11a 'Household social class at age 11-vera'.

If paclass11=1 and maevman=2 and councl1=2 HHSC11a=1.
if paclass11=1 and (maevman=1 or councl1=1) HHSC11a=2.
if n1171=3 HHSC11a=2.
if n1171=4 and ownoccl1=1 hhsc11a=2.
if n1171=4 and ownoccl1=2 hhsc11a=3.
if n1171=5 and ownoccl1=1 HHSC11a=2.
if n1171=5 and ownoccl1=2 HHSC11a=3.
if paclass11=3 and ownoccl1=1 HHsc11a=2.
if paclass11=3 and ownoccl1=2 HHSC11a=3.

freq vars hhsc11a.
```


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NOTES

ⁱ *National Child Development Study*: Sample of Essays (Sweep 2, Age 11), 1969, UKDS, Essex, study number 5790.

ⁱⁱ *National Child Development Study*, 'Social Participation and Identity, 2007-2010: Combining Quantitative Longitudinal Data with a Qualitative Investigation of a Sub-Sample of the 1958 National Child Development Study', UKDS, Essex, study number 6691.

ⁱⁱⁱ It should be noted that some additional work has been done in recent years by researchers to return to the original questionnaires and code the father's occupation more precisely, so that it can be used in constructing measures of social class that are compatible with more recent social class classifications. The coding of the data was undertaken as part of the ESRC Project 'An examination of the impact of family socio-economic status on outcomes in late childhood and adolescence' (ESRC Grant: RES-060-23-0011), led by Professor Paul Gregg. This newly classified data is available from the UK Data Service as Study number 7023 DOI 10.5255/UKDA-SN-7023-1. However, there is considerable missing data.

^{iv} Note that in this paper the total sample for the age 11 sweep of the study is 15,366 corresponding to those responding to at least some sections of the parental interview.

^v Although as explained above some of these cross-class families are likely to be a result of misclassification of either the father or mother's occupation by coders at the time.

Centre for Longitudinal Studies

Institute of Education

20 Bedford Way

London WC1H 0AL

Tel: 020 7612 6860

Fax: 020 7612 6880

Email cls@ioe.ac.uk

Web www.cls.ioe.ac.uk