



Article

# A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment

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**Mike Savage**

London School of Economics, UK

**Fiona Devine**

University of Manchester, UK

**Niall Cunningham**

University of Manchester, UK

**Mark Taylor**

University of York, UK

**Yaojun Li**

University of Manchester, UK

**Johs. Hjellbrekke**

Universitetet i Bergen, Norway

**Brigitte Le Roux**

Université Paris Descartes, France

**Sam Friedman**

City University London, UK

**Andrew Miles**

University of Manchester, UK

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## Corresponding author:

Mike Savage, Department of Sociology, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London, WC2A 2AE, UK.

Email: [m.a.savage@lse.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.savage@lse.ac.uk)

**Abstract**

The social scientific analysis of social class is attracting renewed interest given the accentuation of economic and social inequalities throughout the world. The most widely validated measure of social class, the Nuffield class schema, developed in the 1970s, was codified in the UK's National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) and places people in one of seven main classes according to their occupation and employment status. This principally distinguishes between people working in routine or semi-routine occupations employed on a 'labour contract' on the one hand, and those working in professional or managerial occupations employed on a 'service contract' on the other. However, this occupationally based class schema does not effectively capture the role of social and cultural processes in generating class divisions. We analyse the largest survey of social class ever conducted in the UK, the BBC's 2011 Great British Class Survey, with 161,400 web respondents, as well as a nationally representative sample survey, which includes unusually detailed questions asked on social, cultural and economic capital. Using latent class analysis on these variables, we derive seven classes. We demonstrate the existence of an 'elite', whose wealth separates them from an established middle class, as well as a class of technical experts and a class of 'new affluent' workers. We also show that at the lower levels of the class structure, alongside an ageing traditional working class, there is a 'precariat' characterised by very low levels of capital, and a group of emergent service workers. We think that this new seven class model recognises both social polarisation in British society and class fragmentation in its middle layers, and will attract enormous interest from a wide social scientific community in offering an up-to-date multi-dimensional model of social class.

**Keywords**

cultural capital, latent class analysis, social class

Over the past decade, there has been a striking renewal of interest in the analysis of social class inequality, driven by accumulating evidence of escalating social inequalities, notably with respect to wealth and income, but also around numerous social and cultural indicators, such as mortality rates, educational attainment, housing conditions and forms of leisure participation (e.g. Bennett et al., 2008; Dorling, 2011; Hills, 2010; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2008). Theoretically, this interest has been influenced by the deployment of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual armoury to elaborate a model of class linked not exclusively to employment inequalities, but to the interplay between economic, social and cultural capital (see Bennett et al., 2008; Crompton, 2008; Savage, 2010; Savage et al., 2005). This current of work, sometimes called 'cultural class analysis' (Atkinson, 2010) has cross-fertilised with feminist currents (e.g. Adkins and Skeggs, 2005; Skeggs, 1997) to champion multi-dimensional approaches to the analysis of stratification (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

This article contributes to this current by elaborating a new model of social class which shows how measures of economic, cultural and social capital can be combined to provide a powerful way of mapping contemporary class divisions in the UK. We analyse the largest survey of social class ever conducted in the UK, the BBC's Great British Class Survey (GBCS), a web survey with the unusually high number of 161,400 respondents, complemented by a parallel national representative survey. Using these two surveys in tandem allows us to provide unusual detail on the link between class and specific occupational, educational and geographical profiles which offer unparalleled insights

into the organisation of class inequality in 2011–12. We will show that although a large ‘rump’ of the established middle (or ‘service’) class, and the traditional working class exists, there are five other classes which fit less easily into this conventional sociological framing, and which reveal the extent of social polarisation and class fragmentation in contemporary Britain.

Our analysis proceeds in five steps. Firstly, we discuss how our analysis represents a new phase in class analysis. Secondly, we introduce the two surveys. Thirdly, we explain our measures of economic, cultural and social capital. Fourthly, and most importantly, we explain how we combined our measures of the three capitals, using latent class analysis, to generate our new model of social class. Finally, we describe and explicate each of our seven classes, showing how they intersect with age and gender divisions, drawing out their specific occupational and educational profiles. In our conclusion we draw out our findings for the analysis of social class.

## What Is Social Class?

We are now entering a third phase in the analysis of class and stratification. The first phase, which lasted to the 1980s, saw the dominance of ‘moralising’ official measures of class, enshrined in Britain in the Registrar General’s Class schema, in which ‘standing within the community’ (replaced, at least nominally, by ‘skill’ in 1980) was used to draw a six-fold class schema, with professionals at the top, and unskilled manual workers at the bottom (see Szreter, 1984). In this period, sociological endeavour focused on critiquing these models in favour of more rigorous sociologically informed class schemas, variously deploying theoretical frameworks from Marx and Weber.

The second phase, from the 1970s, saw the triumph of this sociological critique, especially in the elaboration of the influential model of social class developed by John Goldthorpe and his associates at Nuffield College, Oxford University (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Goldthorpe and Marshall, 1992; Goldthorpe et al., 1980; Marshall et al., 1988). Seeing off the rival Marxist framework of Erik Olin Wright (1985), the Erikson–Goldthorpe–Portocarero (EGP) model proved highly influential. This defined seven classes according to an individual’s employment position.<sup>1</sup> It fundamentally differentiated between employees and employers and, amongst the former, between those on a labour contract (routine, semi-routine, technical employees),<sup>2</sup> and those in a more diffuse ‘service relationship’ with their employers (professionals and managers).

This class schema proved hugely influential in the overhaul of the official UK class schema, through the elaboration of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) (Rose and O’Reilly, 1998; Rose and Pevalin, 2003). It has also been very important in the development of cross-national schemes for comparative analysis (e.g. Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Rose and Harrison, 2007, 2010). The Goldthorpe class schema has rightly been of enormous significance, especially in the comparative analysis of social mobility. However, although it is clear that for certain purposes it continues to represent a ‘gold standard’ in the measurement of class, five main lines of criticism can be developed to point to ways in which its purview is limited.

Firstly, as a deductive class schema, the validation of the Goldthorpe class schema predominantly focuses on criterion validity, that is to say, the extent to which it measures those features of the employment relations which are held to define class relationships (Evans and Mills, 2000).<sup>3</sup> Whilst it does this reasonably well (e.g. McGovern et al., 2007), the schema has been shown to be of less use in explicating the wider cultural and social activities and identities (see generally Devine, 1998; Savage, 2000), which do not appear to be closely linked to people's class position, as defined by the Goldthorpe class schema, and alternative schemas have been proposed to explain patterns of cultural consumption (Le Roux et al., 2008). Indeed, this point is recognised by Goldthorpe himself in his recent work with Chan which emphasises that the link between class and cultural consumption is limited (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).

Secondly, it is increasingly apparent that a major appeal of the schema lay as a pragmatic means of placing individuals into social classes using standard nationally representative surveys with a moderate sample size. This is especially important since preferred forms of categorical data analysis such as log-linear modelling required reasonable cell sizes.<sup>4</sup> It is for these pragmatic reasons, for instance, that an 'elite' was not distinguished (see Penn, 1981) within the Goldthorpe class schema (see the discussion in Savage and Williams, 2008). Recently, however, Grusky and his colleagues have used surveys with larger samples to show quite distinctive differences between 'micro-classes' (Butler and Savage, 1995; Devine, 2010; Grusky and Weeden, 2001, 2008; Savage et al., 1992; Weeden and Grusky, 2005; 2012). It might thus be argued that Goldthorpe's class schema is dependent on the hegemony of a particular model of the nationally representative sample survey (see Savage, 2010).

Thirdly, Goldthorpe adopted the standard sociological approach of abstracting class from measures of income and wealth in order to derive class from measures of employment. However, this analytical step has increasingly been criticised by economists who examine moves between income groups, rather than occupational classes, to measure changing patterns of social mobility (Blanden and Machin, 2008; Blanden et al., 2004; Jenkins, 2011). Although Erikson and Goldthorpe (2010) have mounted a powerful defence of the value of occupational class measures, nonetheless it is possible that that income variation within occupations is growing and that if economic measures of inequality are to be kept within the purview of class analysis we need to go beyond measures of occupational class alone.

Fourthly, as feminist critics such as Crompton (2008), Skeggs (1997, 2004), and Bradley (1995) have insisted, a focus on occupations as the sole measure of class occludes the more complex ways that class operates symbolically and culturally, through forms of stigmatisation and marking of personhood and value. Such an appreciation requires a more culturally sensitive mode of analysis.

Fifth, although widely used in comparative studies of social mobility, the validity of the EGP scheme has been challenged. Recently, based on a comparative study of Britain, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, Daniel Oesch (2006) questions several of the assumptions in the EGP scheme for lacking the ability to take highly important horizontal cleavages into account, for giving a too homogenous description of the salaried middle class and for overdoing the manual/non-manual divide when separating between male

production workers and routine sales and service occupations. Comparative studies of industrial organisations (e.g. Maurice et al., 1986[1982]) also show that there are real cross-national differences with respect to qualification levels, job autonomy, career prospects (i.e. social mobility), organisation of production, etc. Two formally identical categories, e.g. 'skilled worker' or 'supervisor', may thus refer to clearly different occupational realities in the countries that are compared. Whereas this problem is acknowledged by Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992: 52), its fundamental implications are even so disregarded in the construction of the EGP scheme.

All these factors explain the appeal of developing a new, multi-dimensional way of registering social class differentiation. A highly influential scheme is that developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984), which argues that there are three different kinds of capital, each of which conveys certain advantages. He differentiates between (1) economic capital (wealth and income), (2) cultural capital (the ability to appreciate and engage with cultural goods, and credentials institutionalised through educational success), and (3) social capital (contacts and connections which allow people to draw on their social networks). Bourdieu's point is that although these three capitals may overlap, they are also subtly different, and that it is possible to draw fine-grained distinctions between people with different stocks of each of the three capitals, to provide a much more complex model of social class than is currently used. This recognition that social class is a multi-dimensional construct indicates that classes are not merely economic phenomena but are also profoundly concerned with forms of social reproduction and cultural distinction (Devine, 2004; Savage et al., 2005),<sup>5</sup> a perspective indeed used by some researchers working with the Goldthorpe class schema (e.g. Breen and Yaish, 2006; Sullivan, 2007). This allows us to reassert an interest in the classical Weberian problematic of 'class formation', through an examination of how stocks of the three capitals might combine to generate distinctive class boundaries.

Bourdieu's interventions have led to influential sociological studies across different nations (Bennett et al., 2001, on Australia; Bennett et al., 2008, on the UK; Lamont, 1992, on the US and France). Hitherto, its application has been limited because comprehensive questions on cultural and social capital are rarely asked on national surveys. In addition, a large sample size is needed to unravel the interactions between these three capitals. It is therefore a major step forward that the BBC's Lab UK, in collaboration with its Current Affairs Department, decided in 2009 to commission a major web survey on social class. The BBC has been running interactive web surveys since 2001 and launched Lab UK in 2009 to host them. Most of the surveys to date have been oriented towards psychology, and the fact that they chose this as their first major sociological topic is itself a comment on the public renewal of interest in class. Our interest in collaborating with the BBC was linked to our view that sociologists need to be open to the possibility that innovations in digital data might provide valuable resources for sociological analysis (Savage and Burrows, 2007).

## **The Great British Class Survey (GBCS)**

The GBCS was designed to include questions to develop detailed measures of economic, cultural and social capitals. Its questions on cultural capital asked about

people's leisure interests, musical tastes, use of the media, and food preferences. Many of the questions were similar to those used on the Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion survey (Bennett et al., 2008), the most sophisticated study of cultural capital ever conducted in Britain, which has influenced numerous other studies across Europe (e.g. Prieur and Savage, 2011). The questions on social capital mainly take the form of 'position generator' developed by the American sociologist Nan Lin (2001) to measure the range of people's social ties. We asked respondents whether they knew anyone in 37 different occupations, which is the most complex and granular question of its type ever used in social research in any part of the world. The questions on economic capital asked not only about household income, but also savings and the value of owner-occupied housing, so allowing unusually detailed measures of economic capital. We also obtained extensive information about household composition, education, social mobility and political attitudes, to contextualise our measures of cultural, economic and social capital.

The web survey was launched on 26 January 2011, with extensive publicity across BBC television and radio, and newspaper coverage. Responses were enthusiastic and, by July 2011, 161,400 complete surveys had been submitted. However, examination of the data revealed that the GBCS web survey suffered from a strong selection bias, with respondents being predominantly drawn from the well-educated social groups. As one BBC journalist told us when we reported this problem, 'yes, you seem to have got a typical BBC news audience there'. To address this problem, the BBC therefore agreed to conduct a separate, nationally representative face-to-face survey using identical questions. This survey, with 1026 respondents, was conducted using quota sampling methods by the well-known survey firm GfK in April 2011. Tests from its field division and by ourselves indicate that its demographics are nationally representative. In this article we refer to the nationally representative survey as GfK and the web survey as GBCS.

Table 1 indicates the difference in the proportions of social class between these two surveys.<sup>6</sup> Traditional professions are massively over-represented in the GBCS compared

**Table 1.** Proportions in occupational classes from GBCS web survey and GfK nationally representative surveys.

Category/group in %	Web sample	National sample	Ratio
Senior manager	13.0	6.3	2.1
Traditional professional	17.9	4.8	3.7
Modern professional	31.5	18.1	1.7
Middle/Junior manager	8.1	6.7	1.2
Intermediate	11.0	14.7	0.7
Technical craft worker	2.4	10.6	0.2
Semi-routine worker	4.9	15.3	0.3
Routine worker	3.2	14.5	0.2
Never worked	7.8	8.3	0.9

to the national figures from GfK, and senior managers and modern professionals are significantly over-represented. All manual workers are massively under-represented. Furthermore, comparisons with the *Culture, Class, Distinction* (Bennett et al., 2008) study showed that it was not possible to simply weight the GBCS to deal with these skews because the GBCS respondents from routine classes turn out to be highly unrepresentative of their peers in these classes. They possess relatively more cultural and social capital than their peers, and indeed the very act of participating in the GBCS was a 'performative' way of claiming cultural stakes (as discussed by Bourdieu, 1984; Skeggs, 2004). Let us be clear, therefore, that GBCS alone cannot be used to derive a representative model of class. However, as we explain in section 4, by linking it to the GfK survey, we can overcome this problem in a way that allows us to combine nationally representative classes with the detailed educational, occupational and geographical profiles from the GBCS.

## Measuring Social, Cultural and Economic Capital

A key first stage of our analysis was to use the GfK to examine the different questions probing economic, social and cultural capital in order to develop the most robust summary measures for each which we could then use to develop our new model of class.

### *Social Capital*

The 37 occupations which respondents might report contacts with were coded to the widely validated Cambridge Social Interaction and Stratification (CAMSIS) scale, so that for every individual respondent we were able to assess how many of the 37 occupations they reported, the mean status scores of the occupations of their contacts (where the scores range from 85.3, the highest, to 4.5, the lowest), and their range (the extent of the difference between the highest and lowest status scores). This is the most elaborate data ever collected in the UK on this issue. Table 2 reports these figures, omitting contacts who are students, who have never worked, and who are aristocrats (the categories have no CAMSIS scores).

Table 2 shows that the average respondent knows socially someone in 13.3 out of the 34 'valid' occupations that are asked about. The mean status score of their contacts is 40.9 and the mean range (the difference between the highest and the lowest of the scores of their contacts) is 62.4.

In our measures for social capital we used only two of these. We omitted 'range' because it is strongly correlated with number of contacts identified (if one knows more people, then this is likely to entail that the range will be greater). To summarise, our measures of social capital are as follows:

- 1 We used the mean status score of the occupations that respondents know (the higher the score, the higher the average status of the social contacts).
- 2 The mean number of social contacts reported (the higher the score, the more of the 34 occupations which are known).



**Table 2.** Summary statistics for social capital in the GBCS and GfK surveys.

	GBCS – mean	GBCS – $\sigma$	GfK – mean	GfK – $\sigma$
Number of occupations reported	13.2	5.5	13.3	7.1
Mean status score of reported occupations	50.2	8.9	40.9	9.7
Range of reported occupations	62.9	13.3	62.4	17.9

Source: GfK and GBCS surveys.

### *Cultural Capital*

The analysis of cultural capital is complex, and we do not have the scope in this article to enter the now extensive debate on its definition and measurement (though see Bennett et al., 2008; Prieur and Savage, 2011). Bourdieu (1984) differentiates between ‘high’ culture, associated with the arts, and ‘popular’ culture, but the clarity of this distinction has been questioned in much recent research (e.g. Bennett et al., 2008; Prieur and Savage, 2011; Warde and Gayo-Cal, 2009). In particular, it has been argued that elite culture has become more liberal and tolerant as the middle and upper classes have become more ‘omnivorous’, keen to partake of both highbrow and popular cultural forms.

We therefore needed to carry out an inductive analysis of cultural taste to reveal the patterning of activity without assuming a priori that certain kinds of activities were more ‘highbrow’ than others. Here, in line with other comparable studies (Bennett et al., 2008), we conducted a specific multiple correspondence analysis (MCA)<sup>7</sup> on 27 cultural variables on the nationally representative GfK to assess the structuring of cultural divisions.

In Figure 1, modalities represent leisure, musical, eating and holiday preferences. Those modalities with a + sign afterwards indicate that this activity is liked, or engaged in, and those with a minus (–) after it indicate that it is disliked or not engaged in. For the eating variables, L indicates liking, D indicates disliking. Finally, the size of the point is related to the frequencies of that variable amongst the sample (hence, liking shopping ‘shop+’ is much more common than going regularly to the theatre, ‘theatre+’).

Figure 1 shows that the first (x) axis differentiates the culturally disengaged from the engaged (on the left). Thus, we see most of the variables on the left with a + sign, and with those on the right having a negative sign. On the second ‘y’ axis of Figure 1, we can also distinguish, at the top, those interested in ‘highbrow’ cultural forms and, at the bottom, those attracted to popular forms of culture associated with sport, using information technology, and popular and contemporary music. This second axis indicates that there are now two main types of cultural capital: that associated with highbrow taste, and what we term ‘emerging’ cultural capital. Both of these are differentiated from those who are less culturally engaged on the measures that we use in the survey.<sup>8</sup> Figure 2 superimposes three socio-demographic variables onto this cultural space: age, class of respondent and of main earner when the respondent was a child. It shows that the first axis is clearly aligned with social class, with the routine classes located on the disengaged right hand side of the y axis, whilst age distinguishes the middle-aged and elderly ‘highbrows’ from the more youthful middle classes attracted to ‘emerging’ cultural capital. This finding is consistent with other research on cultural engagement (e.g. Bennett et al., 2008) and



In our following analysis, we use the two measures of cultural capital in accordance with our MCA (Table 3). We have a measure of ‘highbrow’ cultural capital, which scores the extent of respondents’ engagement with classical music, attending stately homes, museums, art galleries, jazz, theatre and French restaurants. The maximum score which a respondent could obtain (if they ‘often’ engaged in all these activities) is 30. A second score is for ‘emerging’ cultural capital, which is based on the extent of a respondent’s engagement with video games, social network sites, the internet, playing sport, watching sport, spending time with friends, going to the gym, going to gigs and preferences for rap and rock. The maximum score here is 32.

Finally, we have measures of economic capital. Here, we use three of our questions assessing household income, household savings and house price; we standardise household



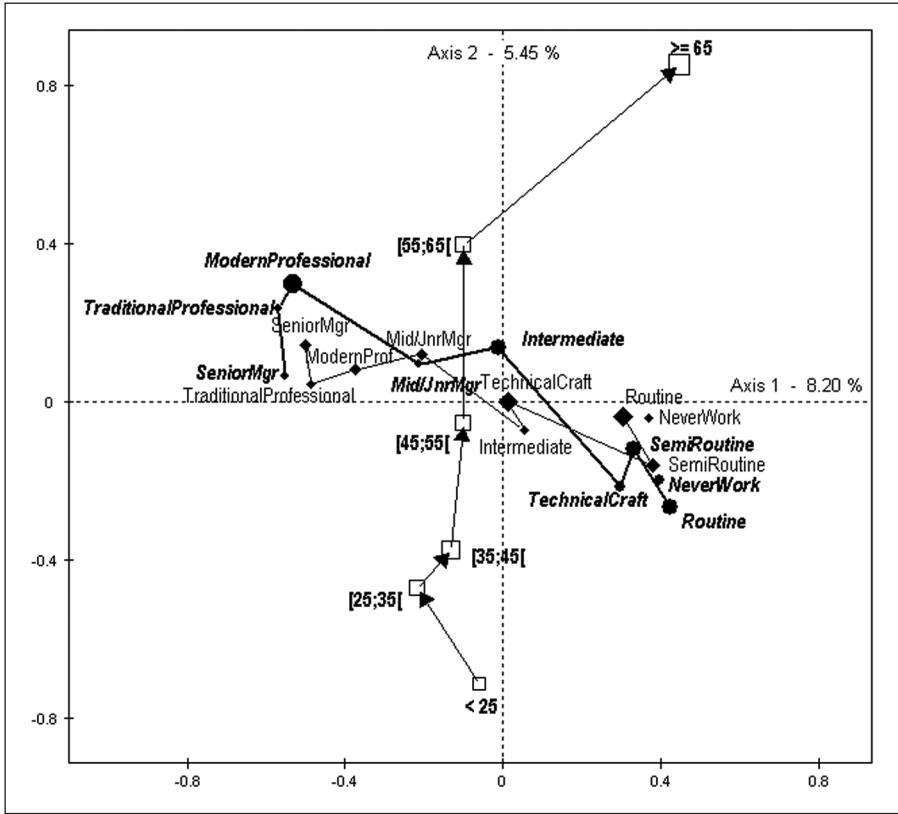


Figure 2. Location of supplementary variables.

Table 3. Summary statistics for cultural capital.

	GBCS – mean	GBCS – $\sigma$	GfK – mean	GfK – $\sigma$
High culture score	13.2	4.6	10.3	4.9
Emerging culture score	18.1	4.8	13.5	6.3

Source: GfK and GBCS surveys.

savings and house prices and combine these standardised variables to generate an ‘assets’ variable. The distribution of these variables is shown in Table 4. We should emphasise here that these measures are for the household, and that it is possible that some individuals who are not in well-paid jobs actually achieve high scores because of the earnings of other household members. We think that a household measure is preferable because it is more likely to tap the economic resources available to individuals; nonetheless, there are likely to be issues of gender inequality (in particular) which will be opaque to such measures.

**Table 4.** Summary statistics for economic capital.

	GBCS – mean	GBCS – $\sigma$	GfK – mean	GfK – $\sigma$
Household income	£52,766	£41,513	£31,856	£31,027
Property value	£204,562	£181,650	£126,706	£127,875
Savings	£36,432	£60,411	£20,084	£47,185

Source: GfK and GBCS surveys.

**A Latent Class Analysis of Social Class**

As we explained in section 2, we are not developing a deductive class schema, but are instead seeking to most parsimoniously differentiate between our measures of economic, social and cultural capital to assess where the main class boundaries are placed. We therefore elaborate a bottom-up, inductive, approach: if our variables are those which are most important for distinguishing between social classes, following Bourdieu, what are the classes that emerge? Our method, latent class analysis, finds the most parsimonious way to group people to classes. Latent class analysis is based on the idea that some parameters of a statistical model differ across unobserved subgroups, which form the categories of a categorical latent variable. It can be distinguished from factor analysis, which identifies continuous latent variables. While latent class analysis is primarily used for the analysis of categorical data, it can also be used for clustering with continuous variables – such a clustering procedure tends to outperform other non-hierarchical cluster analysis such as k-means clustering (Vermunt and Magidson, 2003), and it is this method which we adopt here.<sup>10</sup>

We standardised the six variables specified in the previous section (mean status scores of contacts, total number of contacts, highbrow cultural capital, emerging cultural capital, income and assets), and we carried out a latent class analysis on this basis. In order to overcome the problem of sample skew, we combined cases from the GfK, for which we use the original weighting values, and the cases in the GBCS, which we weight with a value of 1/161400 for each case, so that combined they contribute the weight of a single case to the overall analysis. This means that the latent class analysis is derived from the nationally representative GfK survey, and that the results are not distorted by the unrepresentative web survey. However, the cases from the web survey can be classified within the same clusters as the cases from the nationally representative survey and hence we are able to allocate classes to all the respondents from the web-based GBCS derived from nationally representative data. The Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) is minimised at seven clusters (BIC = 12991.8): we therefore take this as our solution.

Our more sophisticated way of approaching class, looking at cultural, social and economic capitals (using different measures of economic capital) produces a complex map of seven classes. Table 5 briefly identifies these seven main classes, and lists the proportion of respondents from the GfK and GBCS who fit into these. Table 6 reports the detailed scores for each of the measures of capital associated with the latent classes. This is the bedrock of our analysis, and the rest of our article explicates and elaborates these seven classes.

**Table 5.** Summary of social classes.

	% GfK	% GBCS	Description
Elite	6	22	Very high economic capital (especially savings), high social capital, very high highbrow cultural capital
Established middle class	25	43	High economic capital, high status of mean contacts, high highbrow and emerging cultural capital
Technical middle class	6	10	High economic capital, very high mean social contacts, but relatively few contacts reported, moderate cultural capital
New affluent workers	15	6	Moderately good economic capital, moderately poor mean score of social contacts, though high range, moderate highbrow but good emerging cultural capital
Traditional working class	14	2	Moderately poor economic capital, though with reasonable house price, few social contacts, low highbrow and emerging cultural capital
Emergent service workers	19	17	Moderately poor economic capital, though with reasonable household income, moderate social contacts, high emerging (but low highbrow) cultural capital
Precariat	15	<1	Poor economic capital, and the lowest scores on every other criterion

**Table 6.** Seven latent classes.

	Elite	Established middle class	Technical middle class	New affluent workers	Traditional working class	Emergent service workers	Precariat
Household income	£89,082	£47,184	£37,428	£29,252	£13,305	£21,048	£8,253
Household savings	£142,458	£26,090	£65,844	£4,918	£9,500	£1,138	£793
House value	£325,000	£176,834	£163,362	£128,639	£127,174	£17,968	£26,948
Social contact score	50.1	45.3	53.5	37.8	41.5	38.3	29.9
Social contact number	16.2	17.0	3.6	16.9	9.8	14.8	6.7
Highbrow cultural capital	16.9	13.7	9.2	6.9	10.8	9.6	6.0
Emerging cultural capital	14.4	16.5	11.4	14.8	6.5	17.5	8.4

Source: GfK nationally representative survey (with GBCS respondents included and weighted at 161,400th of a case).

Our interpretations of these seven classes are aided by Table 7 which indicates the socio-demographic correlates of these latent classes (also based also on the nationally representative GfK survey). In addition, we also draw on the granular detail provided by the GBCS survey which allows us much more detailed information on the specific jobs and geographical locations of the seven classes.<sup>11</sup> Table 8 indicates the eight occupations that are most over-represented for each of our seven classes, as well as the percentage of GBCS respondents in such occupations that fall into these classes. Table 8 thus allows the occupational profiles of our seven classes to be examined.

**Table 7.** Socio-demographic correlates of seven classes.

	Elite	Established middle class	Technical middle class	New affluent workers	Traditional working class	Emergent service workers	Precariat
Mean age	57	46	52	44	66	34	50
% female	50	54	59	43	62	55	57
% ethnic minority	4	13	9	11	9	21	13
% graduates	56	43	26	11	11	19	3
% with jobs in profs or management	63	51	35	22	31	20	9
% from prof or senior management families	52	41	40	19	17	22	5

Source: GfK nationally representative survey.

**Table 8.** Most ‘over-represented’ occupations in the seven classes.

<b>Elite</b>	<b>21.8*</b>	<b>N</b>
Chief executive officers	60.5	4,953
IT and telecommunications directors	56.7	270
Marketing and sales directors	48.5	899
Functional managers and directors	46.0	782
Barristers and judges	45.1	532
Financial managers	44.6	1,167
Dental practitioners	44.4	169
Advertising and public relations directors	41.2	102
<b>Established middle class</b>	<b>43.3</b>	
Electrical engineers	60.2	128
Occupational therapists	59.7	134
Midwives	59.7	134
Environmental professionals	58.2	249
Police officers	56.8	470
Quality assurance and regulatory professionals	56.2	438

(Continued)

**Table 8.** (Continued)

Town planning officials	55.7	262
Special needs teaching professionals	55.5	173
<b>Technical middle class</b>	<b>9.46</b>	
Medical radiographers	17.1	117
Aircraft pilots	16.9	219
Pharmacists	16.2	278
Higher education teachers	15.8	994
Natural and social science professionals	15.6	1,413
Physical scientists	14.8	540
Senior professionals in education establishments	14.7	1,486
Business, research, and admin positions	14.6	1,051
<b>New affluent workers</b>	<b>5.8</b>	
Electricians and electrical fitters	19.1	247
Postal workers	16.5	266
Retail cashiers and checkout operatives	17.6	307
Plumbers and heating and ventilation engineers	17.2	116
Sales and retail assistants	14.7	2,961
Housing officers	14.4	146
Kitchen and catering assistants	13.9	704
Quality assurance technicians	14.4	111
<b>Traditional working class</b>	<b>1.63</b>	
Medical secretaries	7.2	167
Legal secretaries	6.5	123
Electrical and electronic technicians	5.7	123
Care workers	5.6	769
Cleaners	5.3	340
Van drivers	5.1	176
Electricians	4.8	210
Residential, day, and domiciliary care	4.8	104
<b>Emergent service sector</b>	<b>17.3</b>	
Bar staff	35.7	821
Chefs	35.4	234
Nursing auxiliaries and assistants	35.3	281
Assemblers and routine operatives	34.1	135
Care workers	33.9	769
Elementary storage occupations	33.0	291
Customer service occupations	31.7	1,450
Musicians	31.7	457
<b>Precariat</b>	<b>0.7</b>	
Cleaners	6.47	340
Van drivers	5.11	176
Care workers	4.03	769

**Table 8.** (Continued)

Carpenters and joiners	3.92	102
Caretakers	3.25	123
Leisure and travel service occupations	2.97	101
Shopkeepers and proprietors	2.53	158
Retail cashiers	2.28	307

*Note:* Only occupations with over 100 respondents are included. \*% of GBCS respondents placed in this class. *Source:* GBCS.

These resources together allow us an unusually fine-grained and detailed way of interpreting the key characteristics of these classes. This is especially important in allowing us to move beyond a simple profiling of the differences between the classes to explicate the sociological processes that they reveal. To put the issue bluntly, we need to pull out sociologically meaningful class groups in order to demonstrate that our latent class analysis is producing relevant findings.

Before introducing our seven classes we need to reiterate that our method of defining class boundaries, drawing on measures of cultural, social and economic capital, is very different from that used in constructing the NS-SEC, and hence the two schemes do not compete directly with each other. However, to draw out the distinctive features of our model of class, we reflect on the different kinds of measures of class which they both articulate, and we therefore do comment on how ‘our’ class boundaries appear somewhat different to those which are evident from the NS-SEC.

*Class 1: Elite*

These are, on all dimensions, the most advantaged and privileged group in the UK. They are characterised by having the highest levels of every form of capital. Their mean household income is £89k, almost double that of the next highest class, and the average house price is £325k, considerably higher than any other class. Their average savings are also exceptionally high, well over double that of any other class. Fundamentally, this is a wealthy class, set apart from the other six classes on the basis of their economic advantages.

The elite have close to the highest number of social contacts, though partly for this reason their mean status score is not the highest of all the classes, but the second highest (since if one knows a large number of people, this makes it more likely for them to know both high and low status people). They also score the highest on ‘highbrow’ cultural capital, though by a less marked margin than for their economic capital, and they have moderately high scores on emerging cultural capital – so it would be unwise to just see them as highbrow.

Table 7 also reveals how membership of the elite is associated with other social advantages. They have the lowest proportion of ethnic minorities, the highest proportion of graduates, and over half come from families where the main earner was in senior management or the professions. They are clearly a relatively exclusive grouping, with restricted upward mobility into its ranks.



Table 8 underscores the occupational narrowness of this group. There are major over-representations of (especially) chief executive officers, IT directors, marketing and sales directors, financial managers and management consultants, along with elite professions of dentists and barristers. Graduates of elite universities are over-represented amongst their ranks, especially from Oxford, City, Kings College London, LSE, Cambridge, Bristol, London South Bank, Imperial College and Trinity College Dublin.<sup>13</sup> Strikingly, six of these universities are located in London, only Trinity is from outside the south of England. Geographically (see Figure 3), their residences are all over-represented in the south east of England, and especially in areas close to London in the affluent Home counties.

Our findings thus clearly demonstrate the power of a relatively small, socially and spatially exclusive group at the apex of British society, whose economic wealth sets them apart from the great majority of the population. This finding allows us the prospect of re-integrating class analysis with the study of elites in a way which has not been possible over recent decades where no elite class was distinguished within the EGP, although its existence was recognised (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992: 40).

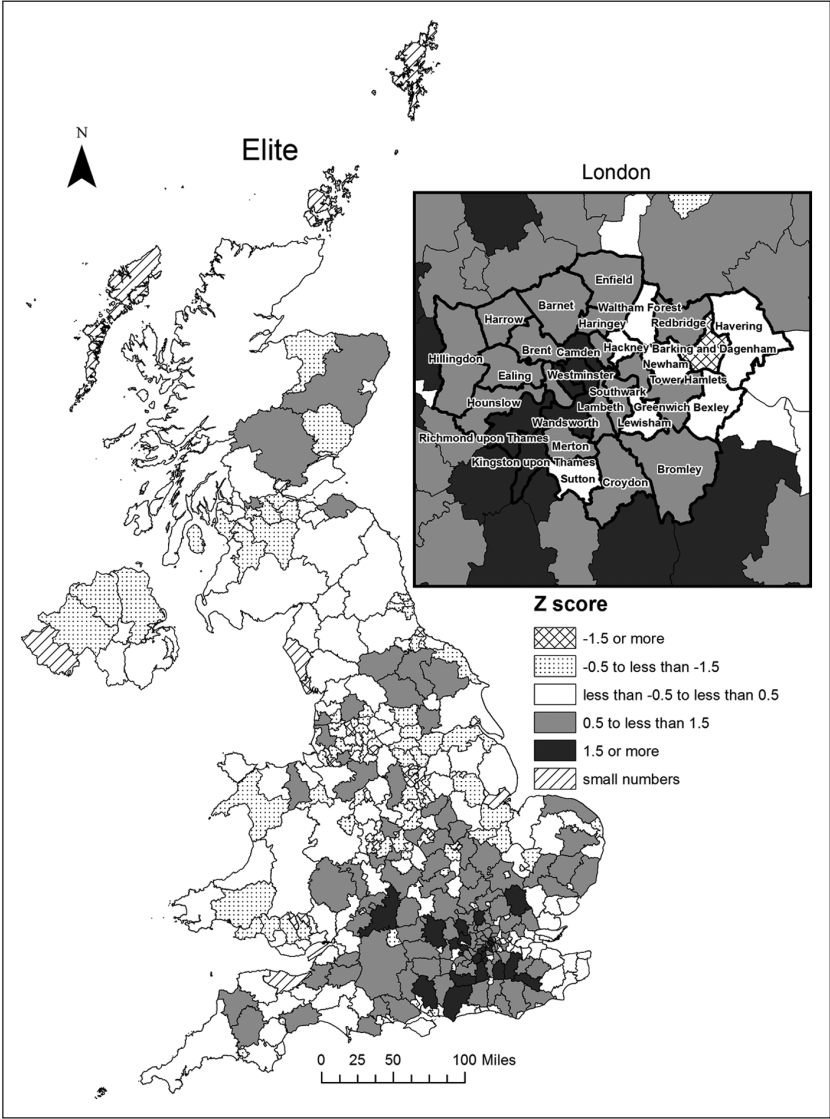
### *Class 2: Established middle class*

This second most advantaged class has a household income of £47k a year, owns a relatively expensive house worth £177k, and has moderately good savings of £26k. These are all good scores for economic capital and it competes with the technical middle class in being the second best well-off class. This is a much larger class than the elite, with a quarter of the population in its ranks, and might be seen as the comfortably off bulwark of British society, even though they do not share the extreme wealth of the elite. It might be seen as comprising the bulk of what Goldthorpe (1982; Goldthorpe et al., 1980) identifies as the professional and managerial 'service class'; it has a higher proportion of members working in management and the professions than any other class except the elite.

They have more social contacts (17) than any other social class and these tend to be high status (the third highest of any class). This therefore appears to be the most gregarious class, especially with other generally high status people (see Erikson, 1996). They are also highly culturally engaged, both for highbrow culture (the second highest scores), and also emerging cultural capital (also second). This is therefore a culturally omnivorous and well-off group, with strong social connections. Its members are highly secure across all three forms of capital, though they lack the marked wealth of the elite.

Table 7 shows that they also have a high proportion of graduates amongst their ranks, and a majority of their members work in the professions or management. They also tend to come from professional and managerial families. However, in some areas they are more open than the elite, especially with a higher representation amongst ethnic minorities.

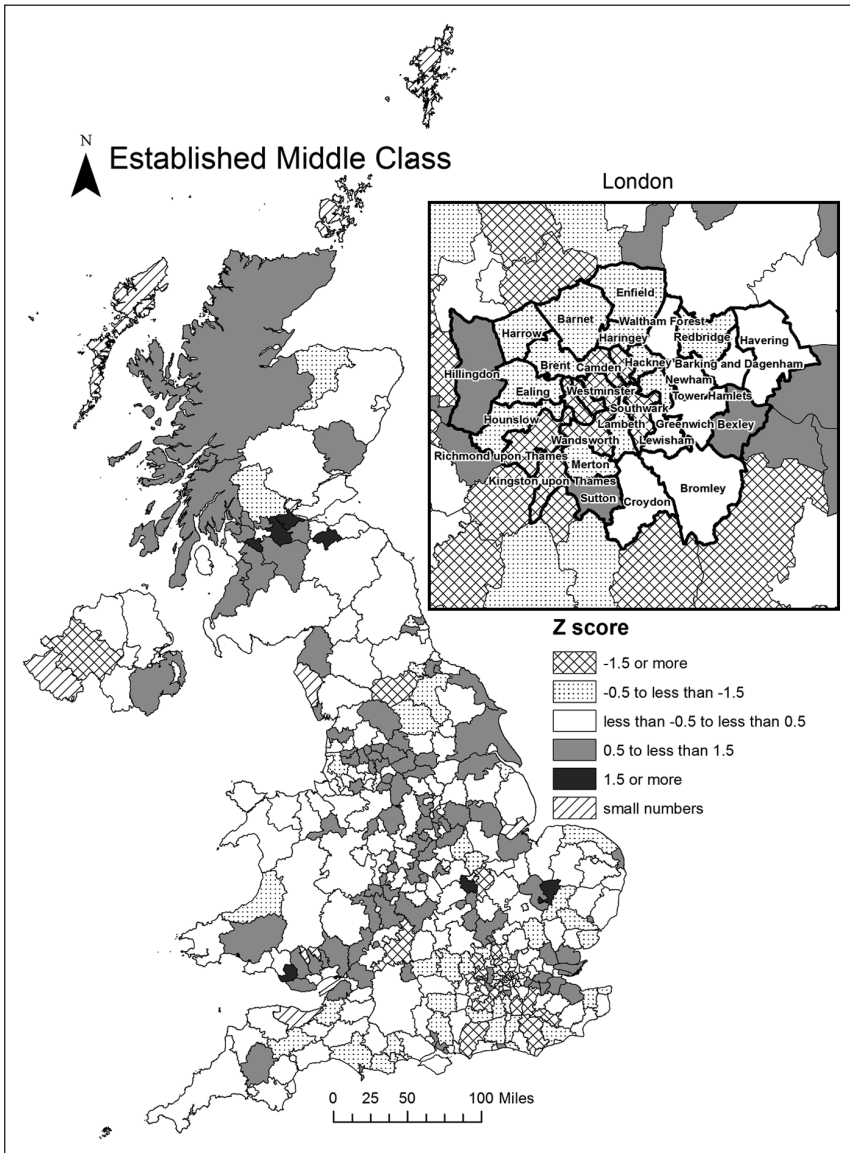
Occupationally, this class does not see such marked over-representations of specific occupations as does the elite, though there are modestly high profiles for professionals working in public service, with some managerial jobs also scoring highly (see Table 8). However, in no case are these occupations more than 50 per cent more likely to be in this



**Figures 3–9.** Maps of each of seven latent classes.  
*Source:* GBCS.

**Figure 3.** Map of Elite social class.  
*Source:* GBCS.

class than the GBCS as a whole, confirming that this class is recruited from a fairly broad occupational range. Educationally, a relatively large number of members are graduates. Geographically, the residences of this group tend to be located outside the south east of England, and mainly away from large towns or urban environments (see Figure 4). This is a ‘provincial’ formation, and is a sizeable bulwark of ‘middle England’: comfortably off, secure, and established.



**Figure 4.** Map of Established middle class.  
Source: GBCS.

*Class 3: Technical middle class*

This class is sociologically much more distinctive and original to our analysis. It is quite small, with only 6 per cent of the national population, but is relatively prosperous, with good mean household incomes (£38k), excellent household savings (£66k) and houses worth considerable amounts of money (£163k). It competes with the established middle class to be the second most prosperous class in terms of economic capital. This is clearly a prosperous group with a secure economic position in British society.

Socially and culturally, however, it is much more restricted than the established middle class. It reports the lowest number of social contacts of any of the classes (an astonishingly low average of four out of 34 possible contacts, compared to 17 for the established middle class), though these do tend to be high status. Its social circle is much more restricted than other social classes, and it presumably socialises nearly exclusively with other professional experts. This is an interesting riposte to those who think it is the poor or disadvantaged whose social networks are the most restricted. In fact, it is this comfortably off technical middle class who are by far the most limited here. Culturally, it also scores relatively low for both highbrow and emerging cultural capital and therefore appears to be relatively culturally disengaged. This class is distinguished by its relative social isolation as well as its cultural apathy.

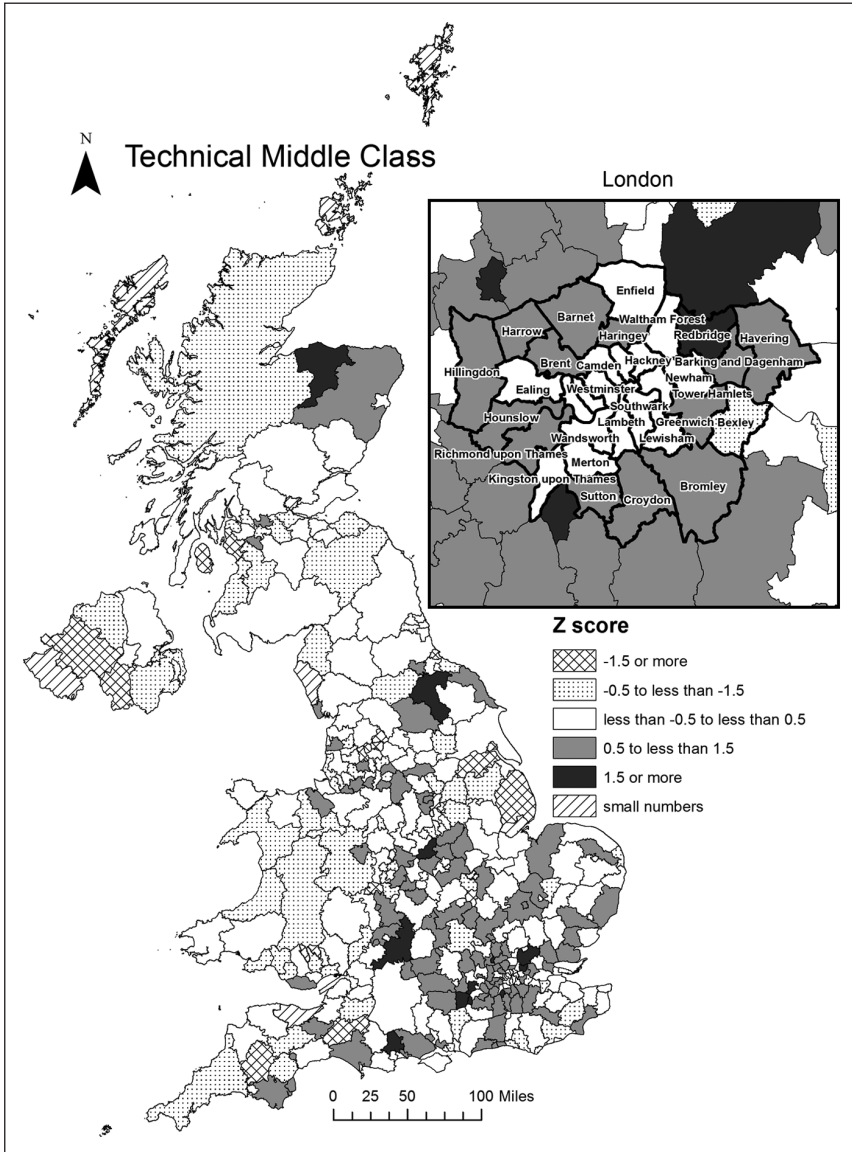
Table 7 shows that it has a lower proportion of graduates and of employees in the professions and management, though the levels of over-representation are also relatively modest, and much less marked than for the elite. Aircraft pilots, for instance, are 78 per cent more likely to be in this class than in the GBCS as a whole. This seems therefore to be a group who has achieved good economic rewards often without distinctive credentials, or through working in established middle-class jobs. Perhaps surprisingly, it has an above-average proportion of women (59%).

We can obtain more detail by using the GBCS to focus our understanding of its profile. There is an over-representation of those doing research, scientific and technical forms of work (see Table 8). Amongst those graduates who are located within it, there are over-representations from established and prestigious universities with strong reputations for science, including Warwick, Cambridge, UCL, Southampton and Imperial. There is also a slight over-representation of graduates in science and technology. Members of this class are geographically located in the South East where scientific and technical jobs are likely to be found (Figure 5), but shun the centre of London and tend to be located in suburban locations (perhaps consistent with their social isolation?).

We might see this class therefore as a group of scientifically and technically oriented people who have used their skills to gain reasonably secure and well-rewarded work, but who might not be seen as part of a more established middle class. Even though they are as likely as the established middle class to come from middle-class families, their degree of social and cultural disengagement is marked. We could see this group as indication of Savage's (2010) argument that in the second half of the 20th century we have witnessed the emergence of a distinctive technical group somewhat at odds with the larger section of the middle classes who are more oriented towards the arts and humanities.

#### *Class 4: New affluent workers*

This class scores highly on 'emerging' cultural capital, but scores low on highbrow cultural capital. It therefore seems to shun established forms of cultural capital though it is not culturally disengaged. Its household income is moderate, and its house value (£129k) is relatively high, and it has a small amount of savings. It is therefore economically secure without being very well off. Its members score the second highest on their number of social contacts, though the status scores tend to be moderate. Overall, this class scores moderately well on all three capitals, with a particular penchant for emerging cultural

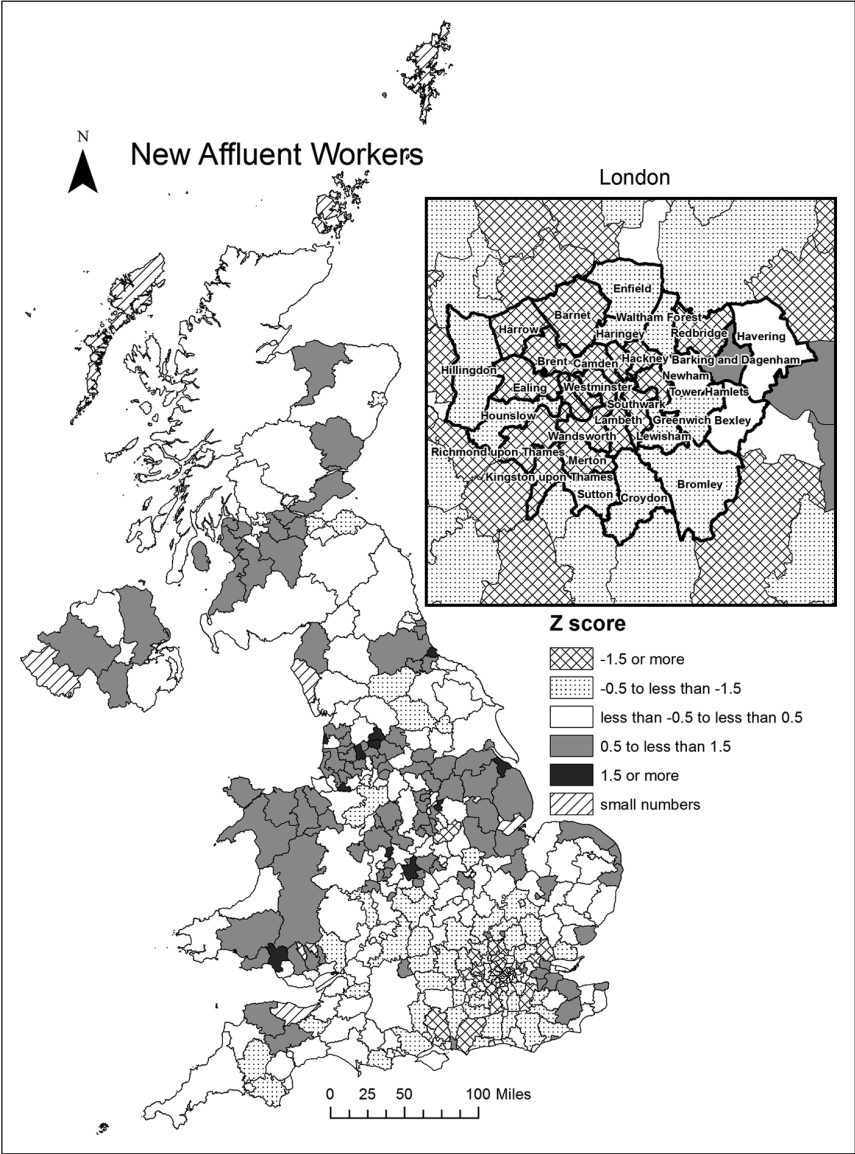


**Figure 5.** Map of Technical middle class.

Source: GBCS.

capital. They are a socially and culturally active class, whose economic capital is higher than for any class apart from the elite or two middle-class groupings.

Table 7 reveals some intriguing aspects of this group. They tend to come from non-middle-class families, and few have been to university. They are the most male of any of our seven classes, with 57 per cent being men. Amongst its relatively few members who are graduates, there are over-representations of graduates from some new universities



**Figure 6.** Map of New affluent workers.  
Source: GBCS.

(such as Liverpool Hope, Bolton, or the University of West England). As we might expect, it has a high proportion of young people. There is a considerable over-representation of various white collar and blue collar jobs, though largely in the private sector and in customer facing occupations: however, since only 5.4 per cent of the GBCS are in this class, only a modest proportion of these occupations (such as electricians and postal workers) are located in this class. They tend to be over-represented in old manufacturing centres of the UK, located outside the south east of England (see Figure 6).



This is a group whose members have not benefitted from conventional routes through education to middle-class positions, but have nonetheless achieved relatively secure economic positions and are also relatively socially and culturally engaged. They seem to have achieved their relative security without major inherited resources of economic or cultural capital. They actually form a significant part of the population, at 15 per cent, but cannot easily be identified as either middle or working class. We have used the term 'new affluent workers', with a nod to Goldthorpe and Lockwood's famous studies from the 1960s, to capture this complex and ambivalent role and sensitise us to the need to understand this as an unusually fluid grouping.

### *Class 5: Traditional working class*

With class 5, we now move onto clearly less advantaged classes. Class 5 is a moderately poor class, with a mean household income of only £13k. However, its members predominantly own their homes, with an average house price of £127k, but it reports only modest savings. The range of social contacts is quite restricted at only 10, and the average status scores are moderate. Scores on highbrow cultural capital are moderate, and scores on emerging cultural capital are particularly low. This class therefore scores low on nearly every measure of capital, though is not completely deprived.

This class has few graduates, and traditional working-class occupations are over-represented amongst its number (e.g. lorry drivers, cleaners, electricians), as are some menial white collar occupations (e.g. legal and medical secretaries). This over-representation is considerable but since less than 2 per cent of the GBCS falls into this class, the absolute proportions are low and the occupations in Table 7 are indicative only. This class is predominantly female, more than any other class. Insofar as particular universities are over-represented, these are ones which tend to recruit mature or part-time students (such as Birkbeck and the Open University). It is strongly over-represented amongst old industrial areas outside the south east of England, especially in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (see Figure 7).

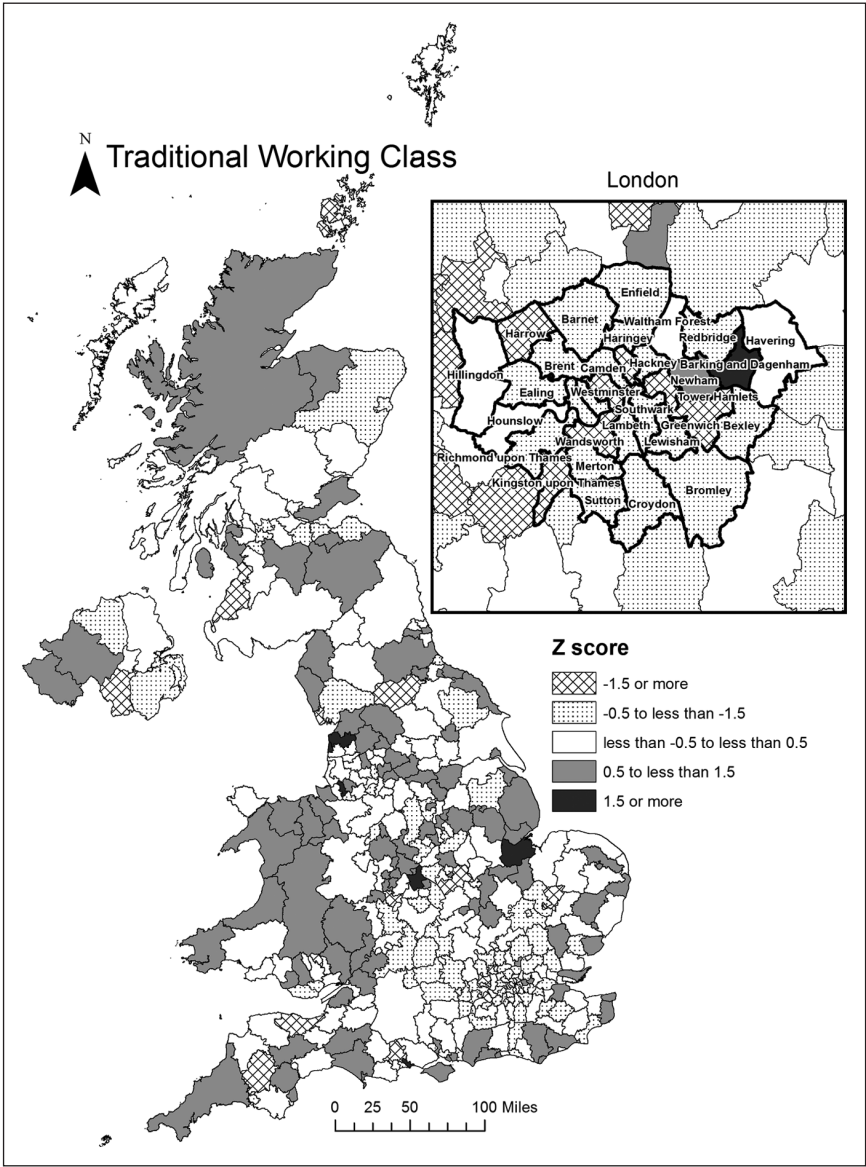
It is for these reasons that we might see this class as a residue of earlier historical periods, and embodying characteristics of the 'traditional working class'. We might see it as a 'throwback' to an earlier phase in Britain's social history, as part of an older generational formation.

### *Class 6: Emergent service workers*

This has a modest household income of £21k, but is likely to rent and only has limited savings. This class does have a significant number of social contacts, who tend to be moderate in their status scores. The emerging cultural capital is higher for this class than for any other class, indicating a high degree of cultural engagement in youthful musical, sporting and internet activities, but highbrow cultural capital is low. This is therefore a marginal class in terms of its economic capital, but its social and cultural capital is high.

This class is relatively young, with a mean age of 34. There is an unusually high proportion of ethnic minorities within it. Its members tend not to be graduates or to come from middle-class families, yet they are very different from the traditional working class in being more culturally engaged with emerging cultural capital. They work in a variety

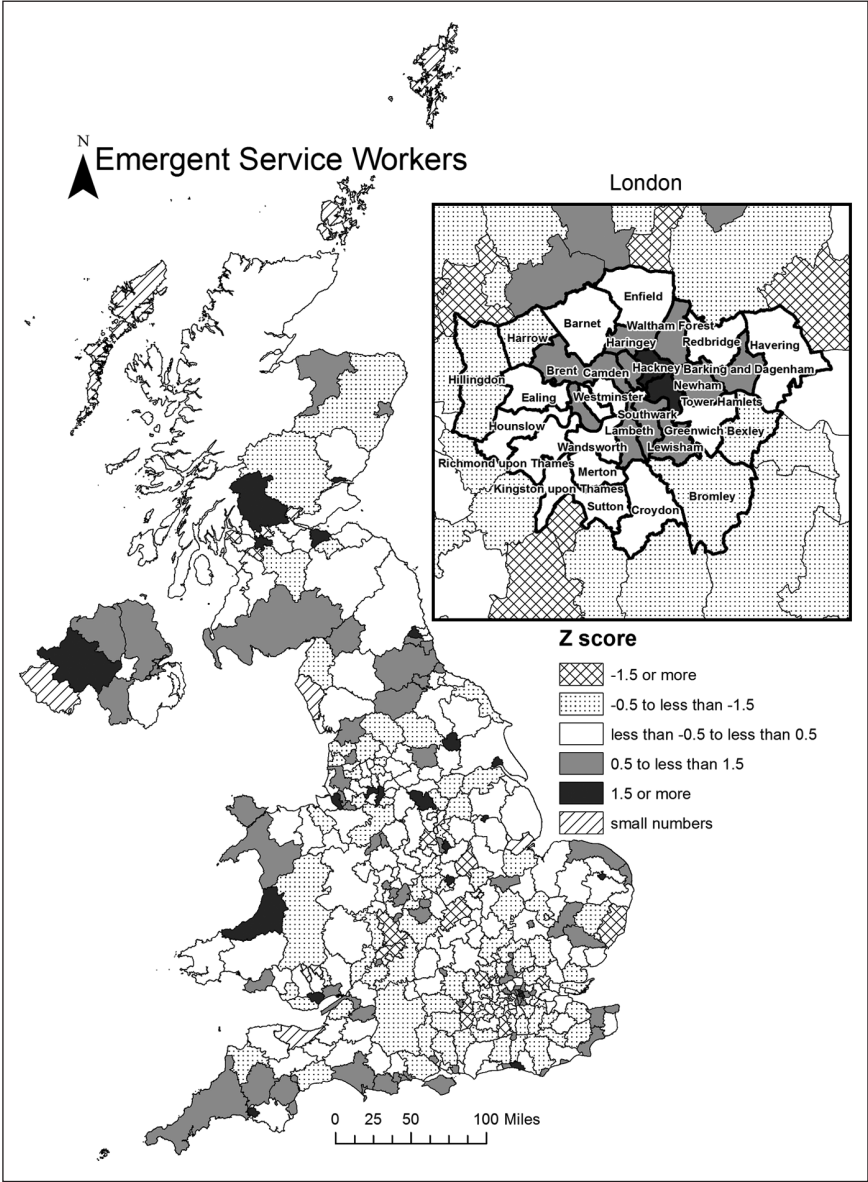




**Figure 7.** Map of Traditional working class.  
Source: GBCS.

of occupations, usually in the service sector, such as bar work, chefs, customer service occupations and call centre workers. This appears therefore to be a class of people who are ‘making their way’ in a range of relatively insecure occupations.

Educationally, those graduates who fall into their ranks include over-representations from well-known universities specialising in arts and humanities such as Goldsmiths, York,<sup>12</sup> Birkbeck and SOAS, and indeed arts and humanities graduates are generally



**Figure 8.** Map of Emergent service workers.  
*Source:* GBCS.

over-represented. This is very much an ‘urban’ grouping, with its members tending to live in cheaper locations within large cities, especially in the centre of London, and also in university towns (such as Aberystwyth or York) (see Figure 8).

In labelling this class, we decided to use the term ‘emergent service workers’, to recognise the extent to which they are a youthful grouping with high amounts of emergent cultural capital.

### *Class 7: Precariat*

This is economically the poorest class, with a household income of only £8k, negligible savings, and they are likely to rent. Their social range is small with an average of seven contacts whose mean status is the lowest of any of the classes. The scores for both highbrow and emerging cultural capital are the lowest and second lowest, respectively, of any of the classes. This is clearly the most deprived of the classes that we have identified, on all measures, yet they form a relatively large social class, with 15 per cent of the population.

They are located in old industrial areas, but often away from the large urban areas. Stoke on Trent stands out as having a high over-representation, but London and the South East tends to score low (see Figure 9). Its members are unlikely to have attended university. Occupationally they are over-represented amongst the unemployed, van drivers, cleaners, carpenters, care workers, cashiers and postal workers, and they also include shopkeepers.

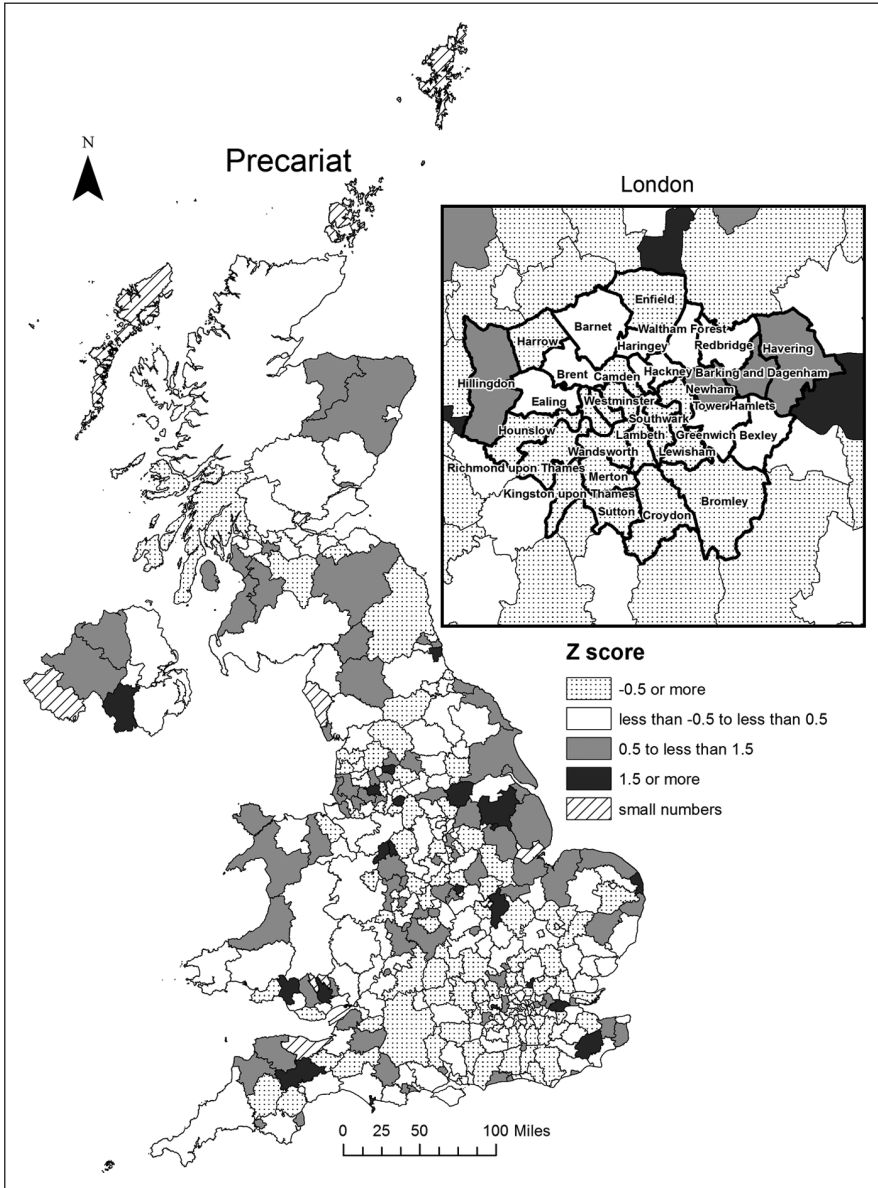
We use the term precariat in line with recent commentaries (Standing, 2011) and as a reflection on the existence of a significant group characterised by high amounts of insecurity on all of our measures of capital.

## **Conclusion**

In this article we have developed a new model of class in contemporary Britain. We should emphasise that this is a different kind of model to that developed by Goldthorpe and embedded in the NS-SEC, since it is an inductive, rather than deductive class schema. The two models are thus not in direct competition with each other, as we are not seeking to develop a better occupational- or employment-based measure of class. Rather, our model is designed to shed more light on how cultural and social boundaries operate in Britain and how this might suggest new lines of class division – an issue which the NS-SEC is less suitable for. Although our analysis here is necessarily quantitative, given our data, we would hope that it might cross fertilise with qualitative research to produce a more developed multi-dimensional approach.

We need to reiterate that our analysis is dependent on the measures used to construct the indicators of capitals. This is an obvious point which nonetheless needs to be underscored. Our measures of economic capital are relatively straightforward and should not cause undue concern, though we need to note that our use of measures of household income will obscure divisions within households and therefore that the relationships between gender and class will not be fully registered here. Our measures of social capital, using the widely validated Cambridge scores, are uncontroversial (Stewart et al., 1973). On the other hand, our use of measures both of ‘highbrow’ and ‘emergent’ cultural capital provides a more nuanced understanding of cultural boundaries in the UK than might be evident from a more orthodox Bourdieusian focus on high culture alone. The extent to which such ‘emerging’ forms of activity represent a robust form of ‘capital’, which might compete with more established and legitimate forms, is an interesting finding which warrants further investigation.

Let us conclude by comparing our findings with more familiar measures of social class, to draw out the wider implications of our model. Firstly, although, as we have



**Figure 9.** Map of Precariat.

Source: GBCS.

discussed, there are clear occupational profiles which map onto our seven classes, the fit is by no means clear. Given the way we have constructed our model, this is not necessarily surprising. Nonetheless, it suggests the need for caution towards those exercises, such as those of Grusky and Weeden (2001, 2008), which focus on micro-classes whereby specific occupations are clearly differentiated from each other. Leaving aside the

particular case of chief executive officers who are predominantly located in our 'elite', we have found no clear affiliation between specific occupations and our latent classes. Perhaps, rather than seeking to locate class fundamentally in occupational 'blocks', the time is now ripe for a different, multi-dimensional perspective, in which occupational membership is spread (though unevenly) between different classes.

Secondly, it is striking that we have been able to discern a distinctive elite, whose sheer economic advantage sets it apart from other classes. Although this is not necessarily surprising, our analysis is the first time that this group has been elaborated within a wider analysis of the class structure, in which they are normally placed alongside a larger group of professionals and managers. Our finding here is an important critical intervention against the deployment of the 'service class' concept, which has failed to recognise the distinctiveness of elite groups within its number (see Savage and Williams, 2008), even though it does recognise the difference between an upper and lower service class. The fact that this elite group is shown to have the most privileged backgrounds also is an important demonstration of the accentuation of social advantage at the top of British society.

Thirdly, at the opposite extreme, we have discerned the existence of a sizeable group – 15 per cent of the population – which is marked by the lack of any significant amount of economic, cultural, or social capital. We have identified these as the 'precarariat'. The recognition of the existence of this group, along with the elite, is a powerful reminder that our conventional approaches to class have hindered our recognition of these two extremes, which occupy a very distinctive place in British society.

Fourthly, only two of our seven classes conform to older sociological models of 'middle' and 'working' class. We might see this as some evidence of a blurring and fragmentation of conventional 'middle' and 'working' class boundaries. Of course, the nature of the class boundaries between middle and working class has been much discussed in previous studies of occupational classes, as with the debate about the 'labour aristocracy', and 'white collar workers'. Our way of interpreting these boundaries is to suggest that the 'established middle class' epitomises the characteristics of 'service class' as elaborated by John Goldthorpe (1982). As Goldthorpe anticipates, this is a large class, indeed the largest single class in our analysis, with a quarter of the population belonging to it. To this degree, the stable middle class are indeed a large group in British society. It does come over as secure and established across all our measures of capital.

The traditional working class might also appear to be its counterpart: the surviving rump of the working class, but they now only comprise 14 per cent of the population, and are relatively old, with an average age of 65. To this extent, the traditional working class is fading from contemporary importance, and clearly is less prominent than the established middle class.

However, only 39 per cent of the national population fall into these two classes, which conform most closely to these middle and working-class sociological stereotypes. Instead, the majority fall into classes which have not been registered by more conventional approaches to class, and require a more fluid understanding of the redrawing of social and cultural boundaries in recent years. Several of the classes thus have over-representations from white collar and blue collar jobs. The 'collar' line is of little value in unravelling these patterns.

Fifthly, some of these new classes do not embody conventional cultural or social capital, yet appear to have obtained moderate levels of economic capital. Here, a conventional Bourdieusian analysis which focuses unduly on the reproduction of educational advantage misses the way that both the new affluent workers and the emergent service workers have acquired certain levels of economic and social capital without access to conventional highbrow culture.

The technical middle class are also a powerful reminder that not all those with economic capital have extensive social networks, and the new affluent workers are revealing too as an interstitial class. We are thus able to challenge the perception that the problem of social and cultural engagement is more marked at the lower levels of the class structure.

The 'new affluent workers' and the 'emergent service workers' are an interesting focus. They seem, in many respects, to be the children of the 'traditional working class', and they might thus be said to exemplify the stark break in working-class culture which has been evident as a result of de-industrialisation, mass unemployment, immigration and the restructuring of urban space. They show high levels of engagement with 'emerging cultural capital' and have extensive social networks, so indicating that they are far from being disengaged in any conventional sense. To this extent, new social formations appear to be emerging out of the tendrils of the traditional working class.

Finally, in conclusion, our new model of class offers a powerful way of comprehending the persistence, yet also the remaking of social class divisions in contemporary Britain. Our multi-dimensional analysis reveals the polarisation of social inequality (in the form of an elite and a precariat), and the fragmentation of traditional sociological middle and working-class divisions into more segmented forms. We have been able to mine down into unusual detail about the educational and occupational profiles of these classes (and our future publications will do this further). We hope that our new model of class will prove a valuable resource for future social researchers in exploring the complex and multi-dimensional nature of social class inequality in the UK in a way which permits us to recognise the ongoing salience of social class divisions in the stratification of British society.

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### **Notes**

1. Occasionally, as a nested construction, the class schema was operationalised as having both 11 and three classes.



2. In some of his work Goldthorpe notes that intermediate occupations are in a 'mixed position', but this qualification does not change his insistence on the primary differentiation between those on service and labour contracts.
3. There are some exceptions which do explore the relationship between class and income, mortality, health and low-weight births (see Rose and Pevalin, 2003).
4. A log-linear model describes the effect(s) or the interaction(s) that are needed in order to give the best possible description of the joint distribution in a two-, three- or multi-way contingency table, and are also widely used in the analysis of mobility tables. Table cells with extreme cell frequencies can, however, make it difficult to identify the model that best describes the distribution (see Bishop et al., 1975; Wickens, 1989).
5. There is an extensive debate on the theorisation of class which we do not have the space to cover here, but see Bennett et al. (2008), Devine (2010) and Savage (2000).
6. Strictly speaking, these are not NS-SEC classes, but occupational categories of the NS-SEC self-coding procedure that was used on the GBCS.
7. MCA is a form of principal components analysis for categorical data which shows the position of modalities as points in an N-dimensional space and can therefore be readily interpreted (see Le Roux and Rouanet, 2010).
8. There is an extensive debate on the measurement and theorisation of cultural engagement and disengagement (e.g. Bennett et al., 2008). Here, we would reiterate that engagement is defined only by the measures we used in the survey, and should not therefore be taken as an absolute definition.
9. Our delineation of 'emerging' cultural capital is provocative and requires more research to substantiate it as a form of capital. We do not claim to know the precise social advantage conferred by such emerging cultural practices, and are aware that it may be more legitimate styles or genres within these popular cultural practices, rather than the entire cultural form, that represent a form of 'capital' (Friedman, 2011).
10. Strictly speaking, this means that we used 'latent profile analysis'.
11. Care is needed here. Our inspection of the GBCS indicates little selection bias differences between professional and managerial occupations, or between types of universities, and therefore our comparisons between these kinds of occupations, and different universities, are robust. However, because GBCS respondents in routine and semi-routine jobs are untypical of their peers, more caution is needed to extrapolate to occupations in the lower social classes. We draw attention to this point where relevant below.
12. The GBCS data include details on specific universities attended. We do not report this aspect of the data fully here as it will be the subject of further, more detailed accounts.
13. Care needs to be taken in interpreting results from the University of York, since the average age of respondents from York is considerably lower than for other universities, and hence may cause selection bias effects.

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## Author biographies

**Mike Savage** is Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics, having previously worked at the universities of Lancaster, Sussex, Surrey, Keele, North Carolina, Manchester and York. His research interests are in class and stratification, especially their cultural and historical dimensions. His recent books include *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford University Press, 2010), and *Culture, Class, Distinction* (with Tony Bennett, Elizabeth Silva, Alan Warde, Modesto Gayo-Cal and David Wright, Routledge, 2008).

**Fiona Devine** is Professor of Sociology and Head of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Manchester, UK. Her research interests are in social stratification and mobility in comparative perspective. She is the author of numerous publications including *Class Practices* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) and *Doing Social Science*, edited with Sue Heath (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

**Niall Cunningham** is Research Associate in Quantitative Analysis at the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC) at the University of Manchester. He has a particular interest in the spatial analysis of ethnic/social participation, segregation and conflict. He is a co-author of *Troubled Geographies: A Spatial History of Religion and Conflict in Ireland since the Famine* (Indiana University Press, 2013).

**Mark Taylor** is Teaching Fellow at the University of York, and is in the last stages of completing his doctorate at Nuffield College, Oxford. He is an expert in quantitative analysis, especially of panel data, with specific interests in cultural sociology, and reading patterns.

**Yaojun Li** is Professor of Sociology at the Institute for Social Change, University of Manchester, UK. His research interests are in social mobility, social capital, and the socio-economic integration of minority ethnic groups, with particular emphasis on comparative analysis. He has published widely in these areas. He has also conducted many projects funded by academic and government bodies in Britain, the USA, China and Australia.

**Johs. Hjelbrekke** is Professor of Sociology at the University of Bergen, Norway. His research interests are in social stratification, social mobility and in statistical analysis of categorical data. He has published widely on social elites, classes, mobility and geometric data analysis.

**Brigitte Le Roux** is Associate Professor of Mathematics at Université de Paris Descartes and was recently awarded the Honoris Causa Doctor of Uppsala University. She is a leading international authority on multiple correspondence analysis.

**Sam Friedman** is Lecturer in Sociology at City University London. He has published widely on comedy, class and social mobility, and is the author of *Comedy and Distinction: The Cultural Currency of a 'Good' Sense of Humour* (Routledge, 2014). He is also a comedy critic and the publisher of *Fest*, the largest magazine covering the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

**Andrew Miles** is Reader in Sociology at the ESRC Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (CRESC) at the University of Manchester. He has previously taught at the universities of Warwick, Cardiff and Keele. Having written widely on the history of stratification and mobility, including *Social Mobility in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century England* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), he is currently working on the social dynamics of cultural participation and policy since 1945 and leads a major interdisciplinary study of everyday participation and cultural value funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

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