ABSTRACT

Social Class and Morality

Jessica D. Farrar, M.A.

Thesis Chairperson: Diana Kendall, Ph.D.

In light of recent economic events in the United States, there has been widespread discussion about the morally questionable actions of financial elites; this raises the question of whether or not there is a link between social class and moral attitudes. This study addresses this issue using data from the 2006 General Social Survey, while also taking into consideration the effects of religion on moral attitudes. For the purpose of simplicity, morality is taken to mean behavior and beliefs that conform to moral law or socially accepted moral standards; I look at general attitudes, not specific types of behavior. Likewise, the U.S. class structure is identified as a multidimensional construct that relies equally upon economic and social identity; the class structure is less a group of distinct categories, but rather more of a continuum that, generally speaking, contains upper, middle, and lower levels.

Social Class and Morality

by

Jessica D. Farrar, B.A.

A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Sociology

_____

Charles M. Tolbert II, Ph.D, Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

Approved by the Thesis Committee

_____

Diana Kendall, Ph.D., Chairperson

_____

F. Carson Mencken, Ph.D.

_____

Jerold L. Waltman, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
May 2010

_____

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Page bearing signatures is kept on file in the Graduate School.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis chairperson, Dr. Diana Kendall, as well as my committee members, Dr. Carson Mencken and Dr. Jerold Waltman, for seeing me through this process.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

H.L. Mencken, an American journalist and satirist from the early twentieth

century once commented on the nature of morality: "Immorality: the morality of those

who are having a better time." This quote suggests, morality can be seen as something

relative and unstable, something that may vary from person to person depending on

each individual situation and perception. It also puts forth the idea that one's morality

may be contingent upon whether or not one is "having a better time" living the "good

life" than others. It is quite obvious that social class is a determinant of the "goodness

of time" one may have. The middle- and upper-social strata are afforded the time and

resources to improve their quality of life. Indeed, studies have proven that contrary

people that fall into the higher socioeconomic status categories actually do, for the most

part, enjoy better mental well-being than those in the lower categories (Loewen 1995,

Myers 2000, Schyns 2002, Blanchflower and Oswald 2004). Thus, it is conceivable

that moral relativity and moral standards may fluctuate as a function of social class.

Relatedly, sociologist Jose Casanova (1994) offers a socially-bound way of determining

what is moral; he claims that morality "can only exist as an intersubjective normative

structure and that individual choices only attain a 'moral' dimension when they are

guided or informed by intersubjective, interpersonal norms." In other words, the

decision of what is immoral or moral is inevitably influenced heavily by a myriad of

1

social factors, and people are moral to the extent that they buy into what society has prescribed as moral guidelines.

Morality under the sociological lens has primarily been linked to religious beliefs and behaviors (ter Voert et al. 1994, Ford and Kadushin 2002, Smith 2003). For example, one study by ter Voert et al. (1994) found that church involvement, denomination both had significant effects on morality; those that attended church more frequently had a stricter moral outlook. Religion is undoubtedly linked to morality in a myriad of ways as it is both a normative and integrative social force (Ford and Kadushin 2002). However, within the last few years, immoral actions perpetrated by a large number of financial elites have had severely detrimental consequences on society as a whole; some examples include widespread lay-offs, bankruptcy, and loss of consumer confidence. These recent events make a sound case for shifting the focus of morality to social class.

Some scholars have already begun to make the connection between class and morality in their research. Prasad et al. (2009) found that middle-class voters' behavior was moderated by their perceived morality of the candidates. Moreover, deviance theories often account for class in the formation of moral bonds and socialization of family members (Akers 1997). Theories about the relationship between class and deviance argue that individuals on the upper rungs of the social ladder will be more likely to buy into society's morals than those that have been less rewarded by the class structure (Akers 1997). However, it is simply the nature of the immoral acts committed by members of both ends of the spectrum differ in some ways, but are both morally substantive. A member of the lower class may rob a convenience store, while someone

in a higher class position may participate in insider trading. The former is more conventionally immoral and deviant, while the latter is often more difficult to identify. This creates a lack of moral saliency that allows it to go unnoticed by the public and to be rationalized by those committing the act. Those occupying the higher end of the class spectrum may not commit outright acts of deviance, but they may still act in an immoral way as they have the means to rationalize their actions by holding more flexible moral attitudes. This study will investigate the extent to which moral views are seen as pliable and influenced by social class. My research will further the discourse on the linkage of class and morality while also controlling for religious behavior which has been shown to have statistically significant effects on morality (et Voert et al. 1994, Ford and Kadushin 2002, Smith 2003).

Social class and morality are both highly ambiguous terms that are heavily laden with controversy. Interestingly, as sociologist Larry Lyon (1999) points out, the most important concepts in our field are usually the most difficult to define; in fact, there seems to be an inverse relationship between significance and number of definitions up for debate. For the purpose of this paper, I will confine both terms as follows. Social class will be identified as a multidimensional construct that relies equally upon economic and social identity. The class structure is less a group of distinct categories, but rather more of a continuum that, generally speaking, contains upper, middle, and lower levels. The Oxford English Dictionary has over ten entries for the term "morality" with numerous denotations. In addition, there are innumerable connotations associated with morality. However, in terms of my study morality is taken to mean behavior and beliefs that conform to socially accepted moral standards. My research is

concerned less with whether or not individuals' behavior fits into some specific moral code. Rather, I will be addressing the role of social class in how people conceptualize morality and rationalize their behavior to be congruent with their class-bound beliefs.

Social Class

Karl Marx, one of the founders of sociology, as well as one of the most prominent pioneers of class analysis boldly asserts that "the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle." Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, other pillars in early sociology paid great attention to the concept of social class and its effects on society at large. In other words, the very inception of sociology as an academic discipline was heavily permeated by the notion that social class had far-reaching implications in most, if not all, areas of social life. While some scholars (Kingston 2000) have argued against the relevance of social class, a growing number of social scientists, such as Erik Olin Wright argue that not only is class not dead, but is just as important, maybe even more so, than it has ever been. Wright, in *Class Counts* (1997), proclaims that class "is a pervasive social cause and thus it is worth exploring its ramifications for many social phenomena." In the last two decades, an ample amount of scholarship has been produced that supports Wright's assertion.

Throughout the years the relevance of social class in the realm of sociological analysis has been called into question, yet there is more evidence in favor of its importance than against it. A review of the recent literature can hopefully put those remaining nay-sayers of class to rest. While Marx's claim that class supersedes any other explanations of "all hitherto existing societies" may have been a bit of an overstatement, it is an error to rule out the significance of social class altogether. Over

4

the decades, there have been multiple resurgences of discussions regarding its importance. A substantial number of respected class analysts argue that not only is class not dead. On the contrary, class is alive and divisions of class have intensified rather than diminished, through the process of globalization (Kendall 2006). Social class, and all it entails, is reproduced from one generation to the next through the process of socialization (Kaufman 2005, Kendall 2006).   Erik Olin Wright (2008), one of the most prolific contemporary class analysts, suggests that class may be able to answer how people, both in individual and collective contexts, "subjectively locate themselves and others in a structure of inequality." Furthermore, the disparity in wages in the United States is rapidly growing, thereby contributing to an increase in social inequality (Scase 1992, Johnson 2001, Grusky and Weeden 2008); consequently, the interest in class relations remains steady.

Moreover, not only has the notion of social class persisted in the academic realm, it still holds meaning to the general public in the United States. This is elucidated in an article titled "How Class Works: Objective and Subjective Aspects of Class Since the 1970s," Michael Hout (2008) identifies thirty-six items that are statistically significantly influenced by social class. Furthermore, he makes the claim that less than three percent of Americans deny class by refusing or failing to answer questions regarding their class positions on the 2000 to 2004 General Social Surveys. What is of even more importance is that the majority of individuals express class identities that match their objective circumstances, which demonstrates that Americans have a fairly reliable grasp on the concept of social class (Wright 1997, Hout 2008, Wright 2008).   As is evidenced by this highly reputable data source, not only do

Americans understand the implications of class differences, but they observe them in their everyday lives and assess themselves accordingly. Class influence extends far beyond self-identification into a diverse array of features of everyday life; researchers (Andersen and Fetner 2008, Capriano et al. 2008, Hout 2008, Lacy and Harris 2008, Manza and Brooks 2008) have found class to affect such things as religious affiliation, political attitudes, educational attainment, tolerance of homosexuality, health, and transition to adulthood, to give but a few examples. Obviously class matters, and there is plenty of empirical evidence to support just how much it matters.

As previously discussed, class is a common element in deviance theories. A classic article by Steven Spitzer (1975) argues in favor of a Marxian theory of deviance. Spitzer (1975) posits that groups become more inclined toward deviance when they question the essential aspects of the Capitalist structure such as social conditions, patterns of distribution, the process of socialization for productive and non-productive roles, and the prevailing ideology. These things all serve to perpetuate the Capitalist system, therefore those that are likely to question are those that find themselves in positions of disempowerment. In other words, class will factor into deviance as those that are rewarded (the upper-class) continue to support the status quo, and those that are not (the lower-class) will begin to challenge it. Control theory (a branch of deviance theory) also takes class into account, though from a different angle (Akers 1997). It seeks to examine the role of conformity and how strongly this influences individuals to commit or refrain from deviant acts (Akers 1997). Its tenets are similar to those of Hirshi's (1969) social bonding theory: attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs that control the individual toward or away from conformity. Social class and the

status it confers serve as both forms of bonding and control. The higher classes are to a large extent more constricting and regulatory in regards to conventional deviance. Yet, as my previous example points out, deviant behavior can manifest itself in a myriad of ways; some acts may appear more blatantly immoral, while others' morality is contingent upon the context within which they are committed and the interpretative lens through which they are examined. In summary, it appears that the social elites' moral relativism sometimes reaches the point of being a true moral double-standard. That is, those in power are likely to prefer moral convention when it supports and maintains their power and status, yet are able to rationalize their own subtly immoral behavior which may have farther-reaching detrimental effects.

Though a concept central to sociological inquiry, "social class" has been accused of being "probably the most ambiguous, confusing, and ill-defined" terms used by social scientists (Scase 1992). "Class" can function as both a noun and an adjective (Wright 2005). As a noun, it can refer to a series of categorical units, for example, "working class" and so forth. As an adjective it can operate as a modifier to a number of concepts that are related to the central "class" theme, such as "class relations" or "class conflict," to name but a few (Wright 2005). In general, many have agreed that class can be broken down into four discrete categories: upper, middle, working, and lower. If this is true, how is it determined in which category an individual falls? As social scientists, we seek to find quantitatively measurable ways to evaluate things, when at all possible. Some might say "income" when asked what comes to mind as an objective measurement of social class; however, as with most sociological concepts, the answer is much more complex than this.

The founding scholars of the discipline constructed their own schemes with

which to assess social class; Marx and Weber worked with more of a conflict approach,

while Durkheim's is usually classified as functionalist. Marx focused on material

factors (Wright 2005), Weber on an aggregation of social power, education, and

prestige (Breen 2005), and Durkheim on the interdependencies and shared belief

systems that result from a division of labor (Grusky 2005). Everything that has

followed seems to have been in some way affiliated with one or a combination of these

theoretical schemas. Kim Weeden and David Grusky (2008) address the issue of the

variety of measurement paradigms that exist for social class; they point out that when

social scientists set out to do a quantitative analysis of class, they often "choose a

measurement paradigm not on the basis of scientific criteria, but rather as a matter of

faith or as a symbolic badge of affiliation with a discipline, subfield, or favored

scholar." The question of measurement paradigm is an important matter, as quantitative

assessments of class appear in a variety of sociological analyses, including life chances

(Breen 2005), health, illness and mortality (Capriano et al. 2008), political attitudes

(Manza and Brooks 2008), lifestyle and consumption practices (Lareau 2003) and

parenting styles (Horvat et al. 2003, Lareau 2008) to give but a few examples. The

measurement techniques are based on a range of things, from income, to occupational,

prestige, to subjective associations with a particular class, or even a combination of

factors. Basically, the question at hand is which is the most effective approach when

trying to foretell how individuals lives will interact with social class? As previously

mentioned, income is far too simplistic and ineffective in making such predictions.

Therefore I have chosen a working class model to be the most suitable, as evidenced by

the existing theory and literature. My study relies on both subjective and objective class measures. The subjective is mere self-identification, while the objective is a more Weberian notion of class that is comprised of educational attainment, total wealth, and income (as a proxy for prestige).

Morality from a Sociological Perspective

Throughout history, the study of morality has often been relegated to the realm of philosophy; names such as Kant or Nietzsche may come to mind. It is a perennial issue, and its presumptions and place in the social order should be reworked in the context of each passing generation (Cotkin 2008). While the study of morality may have its origins in philosophy, it is undoubtedly germane to the scientific study of society (Davidov et al. 2008, Monroe et al. 2009); the ability to understand morality in more social terms could shed light on endeavors to better understand social institutions and the groups of people that act within them. Accordingly, sociologists Chris Shilling and Phillip Mellor (1998) note that there has been a resurgence of sociological interest in morality, and rightfully so, as sources and perceptions of moral action are "central to the foundation of the discipline." As with class, discussions of morality permeate the works of the sociological founders, particularly those of Durkheim; Shilling and Mellor (1998) challenge contemporary sociologists to revise this issue and deal with morality in a wholly sociological manner.

There has been a resurgence of interest in morality in the other social sciences as well, including psychology, geography, and political science. While some studies (Monroe et al. 2009) argue in favor of an innate moral sense, they still acknowledge the evidence in previous research (Monroe 2001, Aquino and Reed 2002, Hardy and Carlo

2005, Shao et al. 2008) that socialization and identity are important components in the

formation of an individual's approach to morality. Moral beliefs and behavior are

closely linked to, and possibly even driven by, an individual's sense of identity (Monroe

2001, Hardy and Carlo 2005). Identity, which Monroe (2001) defines as "the sense

developed early in childhood, of oneself as both an agent and as a kind of object that is

seen, thought about, and liked or disliked by others," affects moral behavior and

attitudes by means of the development of moral schemas which represent what values

that person has learned and the extent to which their importance has been stressed over

time (Shao et al. 2008). Shao et al. (2008) assert that, "a person's moral identity is

presumed to be an important or central part of his or her self-definition," and "it is the

self-importance of this identity" paired with "the desire to maintain self-consistency that

links moral identity to moral action within the social-cognitive framework."

The importance an individual places on her moral identity often predicts

whether or not they will act in a manner consistent with their professed beliefs (Monroe

2001). Moreover, a person's identity and worldview can also influence whether or not

they view morality as constant or situational (Gauthier 1967) and what determines if

moral rules are being broken or merely modified in light of the given circumstances

(Trigg 1971). Lastly, geographers (Sack 1999) have studied morality in terms of place,

and argue that places themselves can be either moral or immoral. Places that inhibit its

occupants' awareness of the effects of their actions on those outside of their circle are

immoral, and those that are diverse and promote awareness of that which exists outside

a particular place are moral (Sack 1999). Moreover, there is a reciprocity between

people and places; each is shaped by the other (Sack 1999) thus the morality or immorality of a place, in these terms, can affect the morals of its inhabitants.

A Case for the Link between Class and Morality

Finally, I would like to address another issue that helps illuminate the important link between class and morality in social scientific inquiry. As stated earlier, the recent events in the United States have instigated widespread discussion about the morally questionable actions of financial elites. What are the contemporary views held about moral issues, and what sociological factors, if any, have the power to influence these views? More specifically, how do individuals construct their moral views about themselves and their contemporaries, and how do they see the implications and consequences of their actions in terms of the "big picture"?

Hypotheses

Due to the evidence that social class plays a significant role in the shaping of a person's identity as well as the assumption that identity will determine moral attitudes and behavior, I hypothesize a discernible relationship between social class and moral attitudes. My hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Both subjective and objective measures of social class will have statistically significant effects on the extent to which the respondents will agree or disagree with the various statements about morality.

Hypothesis 2: The higher the respondent is on the class spectrum, the more relativistic their moral views will become.

Hypothesis 3: Subjective class will have more significance in the models than objective

since it was self-chosen by the respondents; the way they see themselves

will be more influential on their moral perspectives.

In sum, the aim of my research is to address the concept of morality and class in sociological terms. This is achieved by incorporating quantitative measures of these two constructs into my analyses. The results will contribute to the discourse on the social ramifications of the U.S. class structure and class-based identity.

CHAPTER TWO

Data and Methods

Data

The data for this study are from the 2006 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS

is administered bi-annually from February to April. The GSS consists of a random,

national sample of U.S. citizens age 18 and over, and provides the most comprehensive

overview of American attitudes and beliefs on a variety of topics through a combination

of fixed content and rotating topic modules. It varies in sample size; the year I will be

using consists of 4150 respondents. Although the 2008 data are available, they do not

include one of the variables necessary for the construction of my key independent

variable: wealth. Wealth is an integral measure of objective social class, and I did not

feel that there was a viable proxy in the most recent data set; therefore 2006 is the best

suited for my analysis. In recent years, the GSS has also included a variety of questions

regarding views about morality, as well as both subjective and objective measures of

social class and is therefore an appropriate data set for analyzing the relationship between

class and attitudes about morality.

Key Measure

My key measure is social class, which I measure both subjectively and

objectively. For the first measure of class, I measure how respondents classify

themselves with the GSS question, "If you were asked to use one of four names for your

social class, which would you say you belong in: the lower class (1), the working class

(2), the middle class (3), or the upper class (4)?" The overwhelming majority of the

respondents (90.37%) place themselves in the in middle two categories, with 45.57%

falling into "working class" and 44.8% in "middle." Only 6.43% of respondents

answered "lower class" and 3.2% said "upper."

For my second measurement of class, I created an additive scale based on

objective components. While there are multiple ways in which scholars have measured

class (citations), my model is based on the Weberian notion of class: power, prestige,

and wealth. While there are no direct measurements of the first two components on the

GSS, I use household income and education as proxies. There is an occupational prestige

score available, however it would be problematic in the case of respondents that do not

work but have a spouse that holds a job with high levels of prestige; household income,

while not directly correlated to occupational prestige, is a more dependable measure.

Wealth, which has only been asked in 2006, is defined by the GSS as "the value of your

house plus the value of your vehicles, stocks and mutual funds, cash, checking accounts,

retirement accounts including 401(k) and pension assets, and any other assets minus what

you owe for your mortgage and your debts." Over half (57.58%) of respondents have

less than $150,000 of wealth, while only 1.2% have over $1 million.

Since each of these class components rely on different units of measurement, I

calculated their z-scores prior to combining them. As shown in Table 1, "Classw" (the w

for "Weberian") ranges from -7.494 to 5.485, with a mean score of .407 and a standard

deviation of 1.834. Figure 1 provides the distribution of this variable.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev	Minimum	Maximum	N
Dependent					
Blkwhite	1.80	.88	1	4	2935
Rotapple	2.23	.98	1	4	2926
Permoral	1.97	.90	1	4	2903
Demographics					
Age	47.14	16.89	18	89	4492
Childs	.73	.44	0	1	4497
Male	.44	.50	0	1	4510
Married	.48	.49	0	1	4504
South	.39	.49	0	1	4510
White	.72	.44	0	1	4510
Other Controls					
Church attendance	3.75	2.80	0	8	4491
Model Specific					
Classw (objective)	.41	1.83	-7.49	5.49	1431
Class (subjective)	2.45	.66	1	4	2971

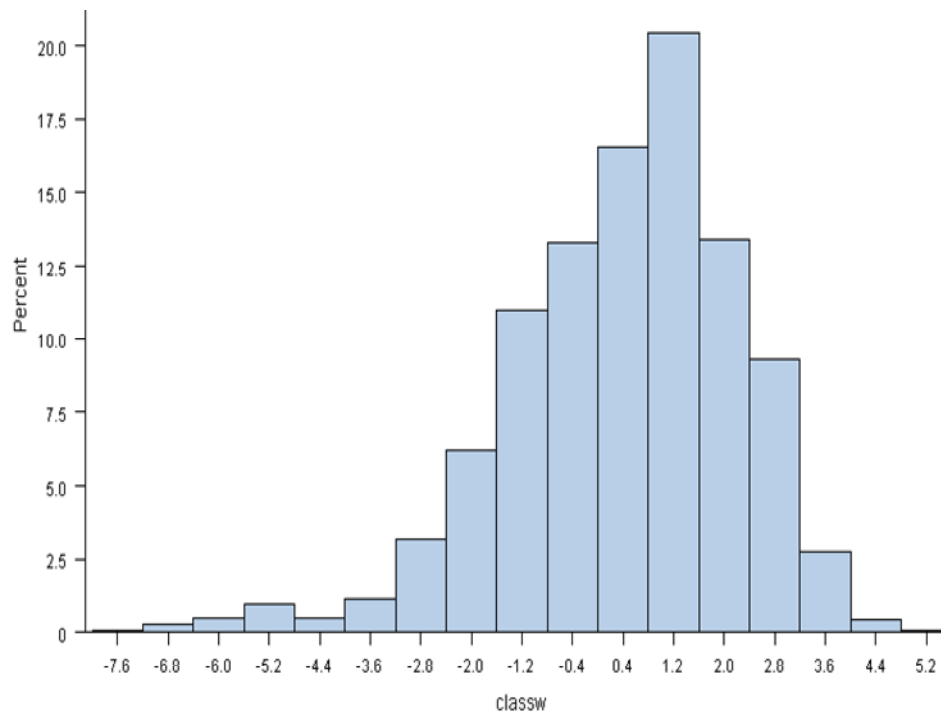Data: General Social Survey
(2006)

Figure 1: Distribution of "classw"

15

Control Variables

Several standard demographic controls are used in this analysis. Marital status (married=1), race (white=1), gender (male=1), whether or not respondents have children (childs=1), and whether or not the respondent lives in the South (south=1) are all included as dummy variables. Age is measured in years. Though education and income are also typical controls, neither is included because they are each components of the class scale; they are left out to avoid issues of multicollinearity. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of each of these variables.

Religion is one of the key purveyors of moral norms, therefore it is necessary to include at least one religious variable in this analysis; I chose church attendance. Church attendance includes the following categories: never, less than once a year, once or twice a year, several times a year, once a month, 2-3 times a month, about weekly, weekly, and several times a week. As shown in Table 1, the mean church attendance of respondents is approximately several times a month.

Analytic Strategy

My analysis consists of six multinomial logistic regressions. Multinomial logits allow the probability of more than two categories to simultaneously be analyzed; since my three dependent variables each have four response categories, this strategy is the most fitting. The first three models regress each of the morality variables on my controls and the "classw" variable (the objective additive scale) and the second set of three includes the "class" variable (the self-identified variable). This allows me to compare the different effects between what people perceive to be their position in society and the position that is dictated by more concrete measures.

Results

In order to test the effects of both objective and subjective social class measures on respondents' positions on three general morality questions taken from the GSS, I ran two sets of three multinomial logistic regressions. The first three models include the objective measure of class, "Classw." As seen in Table 2, church attendance is the only statistically significant variable that affects whether respondents agree or disagree with the statement, "Morality is a personal matter and society should not force everyone to follow one standard," (permoral); it is significant for all three comparisons. For each unit

Table 2
Multinomial Logit of Classw Effects on 'Permoral'

Variables	Agree Strongly vs Disagree Strongly	Agree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly
Intercept	2.698**	2.809**	1.657**
Demographics			
Age	.013	.002	.001
Childs	-.541	-.441	-.493
Male	.152	.026	-.037
Married	-.338	-.135	.063
South	-.091	.137	-.056
White	.081	.140	.503
Other Controls			
Church attendance	-.292**	-.023**	-.173**
Model Specific			
Classw (objective)	-.005	.016	.095

Data: General Social Survey (2006)

N=1406,*p<.05, **p<.01

increase in church attendance, respondents are 3.4% less likely to answer "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly," 43.5% less likely to answer "agree somewhat" than "disagree strongly," and 5.8% less likely to answer "disagree somewhat" than "disagree strongly."

There are a number of statistically significant variables when predicting responses to he statement, "Right and wrong are not usually a simple matter of black and white; there are many shades of gray" (blkwhite); as seen in Table 3, classw is one of them.

Table 3
Multinomial Logit of Classw Effects on 'Blkwhite'

Variables	Agree Strongly vs Disagree Strongly	Agree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly
Intercept	4.308**	3.868**	1.747**
Demographics			
Age	-.004	-.009	-.021
Childs	.040	.024	.183
Male	-.439*	-.254	.173
Married	-.649*	-.519*	-.313
South	-.653**	-.422	-.009
White	-.438	-.391	.034
Other Controls			
Church attendance	-.310**	-.238**	-.154**
Model Specific			
Classw (objective)	.151*	.111	.075

Data: General Social Survey (2006)

N=1406,*p<.05, **p<.01

With each unit increase in classw, the likelihood that respondents will "agree strongly" over "disagree strongly" increases by 6.6%. Males are 2.3% less likely than females to respond "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly." Married people are 1.5% less likely than non-married people to "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly," and 1.9% less

likely to "agree somewhat" than "disagree strongly." Southerners are 1.5% less likely to

"agree strongly" than "disagree strongly." Church attendance, again, is significant in all

three comparisons. With each unit increase in church attendance, respondents are 3.2%

less likely to "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly," 4.2% less likely to "agree

somewhat" than "disagree strongly," and 6.5% less likely to "disagree somewhat" than

"disagree strongly."

In response to the statement, ""immoral actions by one person can corrupt society

in general" (rotapple), church attendance is again significant in predicting how people

respond, but so are age and classw, as seen in Table 4. With each year increase in age,

Table 4

Multinomial Logit of Classw Effects on 'Rotapple'

Variables	Agree Strongly vs Disagree Strongly	Agree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly
Intercept	.571	1.706**	.701
Demographics			
Age	-.024**	-.029**	-.012
Childs	.133	.026	.139
Male	.290	.046	.183
Married	.014	.048	-.132
South	.183	.164	.126
White	.028	.198	.203
Other Controls			
Church attendance	.237**	.111**	.040
Model Specific			
Classw (objective)	-.152*	-.086	-.016

Data: General Social Survey (2006)

N=1406,*p<.05, **p<.01

respondents are 41.7% less likely to "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly," and 34.5%

less likely to "agree somewhat" than "disagree strongly." A one unit increase in church

attendances increases the likelihood by 4.2% that respondents will "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly," as well as increases the likelihood by 9% that they will "agree somewhat" than "disagree strongly." Every one unit increase in classw yields a 6.6% decrease in the likelihood that respondents will "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly."

The next three models include the subjective, or self-identified, class variable. As with the first model, only church attendance is significant in predicting how respondents feel about the permoral statement. Shown in Table 5, with every unit increase in church attendance respondents are 4.1% less likely to "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly," 5.5% less likely to "agree somewhat" than "disagree strongly," and 6.8% less likely to "disagree somewhat" than "disagree strongly."

Table 5
Multinomial Logit of Class Effects on 'Permoral'

Variables	Agree Strongly vs Disagree Strongly	Agree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly
Intercept	2.552**	2.538**	1.292**
Demographics			
Age	.003	-.001	-.002
Childs	-.298	-.249	-.359
Male	.192	.039	-.048
Married	-.101	-.040	.237
South	-.186	-.071	-.288
White	-.286	-.158	.102
Other Controls			
Church attendance	-.241**	-.182**	-.147**
Model Specific			
Class (subjective)	.158	.156	.251

Data: General Social Survey (2006)

N=1406,*p<.05,**p<.01

In predicting responses to the blkwhite statement, marital status, whether or not respondent lives in the South, whether or not respondent is white, church attendance, and class are statistically significant, which is shown in Table 6. Married respondents are

Table 6
Multinomial Logit of Class Effects on 'Blkwhite'

Variables	Agree Strongly vs Disagree Strongly	Agree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly
Intercept	3.112**	2.938**	1.355**
Demographics			
Age	.001	.002	-.008
Childs	-.166	-.247	-.077
Male	-.196	-.057	.321
Married	-.413*	-.277	-.192
South	-.681**	-.430**	-.239
White	-.293	-.457*	-.345
Other Controls			
Church attendance	-.275**	-.244**	-.172**
Model Specific			
Class (subjective)	.331**	.279*	.245

Data: General Social Survey (2006)
N=1406,*p<.05,**p<.01

2.4% less likely than non-married respondents to "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly." Southerners are 1.5% less likely than respondents from other regions of the country to "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly," and 2.3% less likely to "agree somewhat" than "disagree strongly." Whites are 2.2% less likely to "agree somewhat" than "disagree strongly" than non-whites. Witch each unit increase in church attendance, the likelihood that respondents will "agree strongly" over "disagree strongly" drops 3.6%, "agree somewhat" over "disagree strongly" by 4.1%, and "disagree somewhat" over "disagree strongly" by 5.8%. Finally, which each unit increase on the class scale,

respondents are 3% more likely to "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly," and 3.6%

more likely to "agree somewhat" than "disagree strongly."

As shown in Table 7, age, whether or not respondent lives in the South or is

Table 7
Multinomial Logit of Class Effects on 'Rotapple'

Variables	Agree Strongly vs Disagree Strongly	Agree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly	Disagree Somewhat vs Disagree Strongly
Intercept	1.360**	1.676**	1.107**
Demographics			
Age	-.007	-.012**	-.008
Childs	-.063	-.121	-.096
Male	.060	-.088	-.121
Married	.119	-.005	.116
South	.297*	.197	.112
White	-.360*	-.084	.044
Other Controls			
Church attendance	.154**	.075**	.025
Model Specific			
Class (subjective)	-.308**	-.064	-.061

Data: General Social Survey (2006)

N=1406,*p<.05,**p<.01

white, church attendance, and class are significant predictors of to what extent

respondents will agree or disagree with the rotapple statement. With each year increase

in age, respondents are 83.3% less likely to "agree strongly" than "disagree strongly."

Southerners are 3.4% more likely than non-southerners to "agree strongly" than "disagree

strongly." Whites are 2.8% less likely than non-whites to "agree strongly" than "disagree

strongly." As church attendance increases, respondents are 6.5% more likely to "agree

strongly" than "disagree strongly," and 13.3% more likely to "agree somewhat" than

"disagree strongly." As class increases, the likelihood of "agree strongly" over "disagree strongly" decreases by 3.2%.

Discussion

Class does in fact affect people's attitudes about morality. My first hypothesis, that both measures of class will have statistically significant effects on the extent to which respondents agree or disagree to the statements about morality, is partially supported by the data. While neither measure of class significantly predicted whether an individual sees moral standards as more of a personal matter rather than something that should be enforced by the greater society. However, both measures do show statistical significance on the other two items, which are the view of morality as a black and white matter and whether or not one person's actions can corrupt society in general. My second hypothesis, that respondents' moral views will become more relative as class increases, is also supported. As objective and subjective class increase, so too does the belief that the issue of right and wrong is much more complicated than black and white. The lower an individual is located on the class continuum, the probability that they will see right and wrong in a more rigid manner increases. Finally, my third hypothesis is also supported; I predicted that subjective class measures would yield more significant effects than objective measures, and that is the case for these analyses. Furthermore, both objective and subjective class variables have significant, negative relationships with the opinion that one person's immoral actions can impact society in general. It could be inferred from these data that those located higher on the class continuum do not adhere to the notion that their personal behavior matters in terms of how it will affect others on a society-wide scale.

Marital status, age, and region of the country are also consistently statistically significant in regards to the extent with which respondents agree with the statements throughout the models, though less consistently. Both married people and Southerners are only slightly more likely to disagree with the proposition that right and wrong contain many shades of gray. Older respondents are more likely to disagree with the proposition that one person's actions have the ability to hurt society.

Finally, as could be inferred from the literature (ter Voert et al. 1994, Ford and Kadushin 2002, Smith 2003), church attendance is by far the most robust predictor of an individual's moral attitudes. The more frequently a person attends church, the less likely she is to see morality as a personal matter. Those who attend more frequently are more likely to believe that there is a universal moral standard to which everyone is subject. Along the same lines, more frequently church goers do not see morality as flexible but rather as a set of rigid guidelines that apply in all contexts. People who attend church more often are more likely to disagree with the position that one person's immoral actions can hurt society. These individuals may believe that God has the ability to influence society's well-being rather than individual people.

As is evidenced by the analyses, social class does to some extent shape people's perceptions about morality. Why might this be the case? As studies on morality have suggested, the influence of moral attitudes varies based on on how integrated they are into a person's sense of self (Monroe 2001, Aquino and Reed 2002, Hardy and Carlo 2005, Shao et al. 2008, Monroe et al. 2009). Additionally, the places a person frequents will influence morals (Sack 1999). For example, those who spend a significant amount of time volunteering at a homeless shelter will become more aware of the people and

world outside of their inner-circles and be more moral by societal standards (Sack 1999).

By contrast, individuals who spend most of their time at a private club will primarily be

aware of their immediate peers and may be less moral in this respect. Also worth noting,

people's surrounding circumstances will play a role in how one interprets the flexibility

of a moral rule (Gauthier 1967, Trigg 1971). To demonstrate this point, one might

consider the classic example of an ethical dilemma: stealing is wrong, but is it wrong to

steal if one does so in order to feed one's family which would otherwise starve? Class

serves as an integral determinant for all of these things, thus class is a likely determinant

of morality. People tend to be well aware of their class-based identities (Hout 2008), and

the places individuals will inhabit are all too often influenced by class (Kendall 2006).

For example, boundary maintenance--the intentional social and physical separation of

one group of people from everyone else--is one salient feature of the upper- and middle-

classes. In the presence of a gated mentality, people "physically and socially segregate

themselves from the masses" which makes it possible for them to "ignore the needs and

concerns of those who are not within their own inner [social, economic, and political]

circle (Kendall 2006)." Immorality of a place is "due to a lack of awareness of the

consequences of our actions and of the possibilities that exist to do better (Sack 1999)"

and the aforementioned places fall into this category. Those who are higher up on the

class spectrum are reducing the possibility for morality within their surroundings by

inhibiting their awareness of everyone beyond their immediate sphere.

So, what are the implications of moral attitudes being partially contingent upon

social class? As class increases people become more likely to espouse the idea that

morality is much more complicated than a black and white matter, and that one person's

immoral actions cannot hurt all of society. This is substantively significant for the following reasons. The first aspect suggests that there exists a class-based exceptionalism. People on the higher rungs of the class ladder see morality as consisting mostly of gray, and it is highly possible that they will allow their views to be shaped in a way that is more advantageous to them specifically rather than to people of all classes. While someone on the lower end of the spectrum may view a particular action as immoral, someone on the higher end might be able to rationalize this action as being moral because of the context in which this action is committed or other external factors surrounding it. An example is white-collar crime, which includes insider trading, bribery, and embezzlement. These offenses can be difficult to detect as the factors that characterize these actions may vary situationally and are not easily observable by those who do not have specialized knowledge in these fields. Also, while those of higher classes are less likely to believe that an individual's actions can corrupt society in general, it is precisely that group of people whose actions are the most influential on a large scale. This has been problematic, for example, in cases of white-collar crime in which the immoral actions of financial elites harm hundreds or thousands of employees, shareholders, and others. Basically, my analysis suggests that the higher one is on the class spectrum, the more likely she is to adhere to a moral code that is primarily beneficial to that individual's class alone. Consequently, people higher on the class structure may not acknowledge the potential far-reaching consequences of their actions and continue to commit acts that have extensive, harmful consequences (financial or otherwise) to others in their cities and the larger global community.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

There has been a significant amount of sociological research on social class and its effects on various attitudes and behaviors, yet little attention has been paid to if and how it affects the general beliefs people have regarding morality. Additionally, morality in the sociological sphere has primarily been relegated to the study of religious behaviors. While both are valid avenues of exploration, I deemed exploring the connection between the two a worthwhile endeavor.   Social class is one of the most pervasive and influential factors in society and moral values are some of the most fundamental and personal beliefs an individual can hold; it seems intuitive that there exists a connection between these two social constructs.

Using recent data from a reputable source, the General Social Survey, I set out to empirically test how both objective and subjective class affect morality; more specifically, the extent to which attitudes about morality are relativistic with regards to class. Through a series of multinomial logit models, I found statistically significant evidence in favor of each of my hypotheses: that both objective and subjective measures of social class would affect respondents' attitudes, that the higher the respondent is on the class spectrum the more relativistic their moral views become, and finally, that the subjective measure of class would be more significant in models than the objective measure.

These findings are substantively significant as well, in that social class may now be viewed as a predictor of moral attitudes and, it logically follows, behavior. This

study contributes not only to the discourse on the social ramifications of the U.S. class structure and class-based identity, but also demonstrates the viability of morality from a sociological perspective in spheres beyond the sociology of religion. Furthermore, the implications of my findings regarding those on the higher end of the class spectrum suggests that there may be a sense of classist exceptionalism; or in other words, these individuals are more likely to rationalize what may to some be considered immoral behavior, and are less worried about the potential societal consequences their actions have. Although there are limitations to this study, these significant results should prompt a series of other research questions.

I would like to point out a key limitation of my study, and then suggest possibilities for future research on this topic. The data for my study are from 2006, though the most recent GSS data are from 2008. While there is more current data available, the 2008 GSS does not include the 'wealth' variable, an integral component of my Weberian class model. Perhaps the 2010 data will cover this particular question, which would be useful for future investigations of class and morality. If the 2010 data is available for wealth, I recommend that my analysis be duplicated with the more recent numbers; these findings could then be compared to the study of the 2006 data. In 2008, the United States was stricken with a wide-scale economic recession and financial elites' actions were closely scrutinized throughout the process of trying to ameliorate it. Is it reasonable to assume that moral perspectives have changed over this period of crisis? If data on wealth are not available in the more recent years of the GSS, it would still be useful to look at whether or not responses to the three statements on morality

have altered. I would predict that agreement with the statement, "immoral actions by one person can corrupt society in general," will have increased.

This study calls for the continuation of a systematic approach to class analysis that focus on the behavior and actions of people on varying points along the class spectrum. Throughout the history of the United States, there has always been a distinct upper-class despite whatever hardships the rest of the country may be enduring (Loewen 1995). As the behavior and attitudes of the upper-class are often emulated by those on lower rungs of the ladder (Kendall 2005), is it reasonable to assume that they are also influential in the moral and ethical sphere? Furthermore, as their wrong-doings are exposed will they reform their future behavior to fit into societally accepted norms of morality, or will they instead influence change in what the larger society deems moral? I predict the latter, however only future studies have the ability to prove or disprove this assumption.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Andersen, R., & Fetner, T. (2008). Cohort Differences in Tolerance of Homosexuality: Attitudinal Change in Canada and the United States, 1981-2000 *Public Opinion Quarterly, 72*(2), 311.

Blanchflower, D. G., & Oswald, A. J. (2004). Money, Sex and Happiness: An Empirical Study. *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics, 106*(3, Behavioral Economics), 393-415. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3441116

Breen, R. (2005). Foundations of a Neo-Weberian Class Analysis. In E. O. Wright (Ed.), *Approaches to Class Analysis* (pp. 31). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Capriano, R. M., Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2008). Social Inequality and Health: Future Directions for the Fundamental Cause Explanation. In A. Lareau, & D. Conley (Eds.), *Social Class: How Does it Work?* (pp. 232). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Casanova, J. (1994). *Public religions in the modern world*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cotkin, G. (2008). History's Moral Turn. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 69*(2), 293-315. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=31715703&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Davidov, E., Schmidt, P., & Schwartz, S. H. (2008). Bringing Values Back In: The Adequacy of the European Social Survey to Measure Values in 20 Countries *Public Opinion Quarterly, 72*(3), 420.

Ford, J., & Kadushin, C. (2002). Between Sacral Belief and Moral Community: A Multidimensional Approach to the Relationship between Religion and Alcohol among Whites and Blacks. *Sociological Forum, 17*(2), 255-279. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3070326

Gauthier, D. P. (1967). Morality and Advantage. *The Philosophical Review, 76*(4), 460-475. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2183283

Goldthorpe, J. (2008). Two Oppositions in Studies of Class: A Reflection. In A. Lareau, & D. Conley (Eds.), *Social Class: How Does it Work?* (pp. 350). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Goldthorpe, J., & Jackson, M. (2008). Education-Based Meritocracy: The Barriers to Its Realization. In A. Lareau, & D. Conley (Eds.), *Social Class: How Does it Work?* (pp. 93). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Grusky, D. B. (2005). Foundations of a Neo-Durkheimian Class-Analysis. In E. O. Wright (Ed.), *Approaches to Class Analysis* (pp. 51). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grusky, D. B., & Weeden, K. A. (2008). Are There Social Classes? A Framework for Testing Sociology's Favorite Concept. In A. Lareau, & D. Conley (Eds.), *Social Class: How Does it Work?* (pp. 65). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Hardy, S. A., & Carlo, G. (2005). Identity as a Source of Moral Motivation. *Human Development (0018716X), 48*(4), 232-256. doi:10.1159/000086859

Heckert, A., & Heckert, D. M. (2004). Using an Integrated Typology of Deviance to Analyze Ten Common Norms of the U.S. Middle Class. *The Sociological Quarterly, 45*(2), 209-228. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4121170

Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Horvat, E. M., Weininger, E. B., & Lareau, A. (2003). From Social Ties to Social Capital: Class Differences in the Relations between Schools and Parent Networks. *American Educational Research Journal, 40*(2), 319-351. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3699392

Hout, M. (2008). How Class Works: Objective and Subjective Aspects of Class Since the 1970s. In A. Lareau, & D. Conley (Eds.), *Social Class: How Does it Work?* (pp. 25). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Jackman, M. R. (1979). The Subjective Meaning of Social Class Identification in the United States. *The Public Opinion Quarterly, 43*(4), 443-462. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2748545

Kaufman, P. (2005). Middle-Class Social Reproduction: The Activation and Negotiation of Structural Advantages. *Sociological Forum, 20*(2), 245-270. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4540894

Kendall, D. (2006). Class in the United States: Not only alive but reproducing. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, 24*, 89.

Kendall, D. (2008). *Members Only: Elite Clubs and the Process of Exclusion*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Kendall, D. E. (2005). *Framing class : media representations of wealth and poverty in America*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Kingston, P. (2000). *The Classless Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Lacy, K., & Harris, A. L. (2008). Breaking the Class Monolith: Understanding Class Differences in Black Adolescents' Attachment to Racial Identity. In A. Lareau, & D. Conley (Eds.), *Social Class: How Does it Work?* (pp. 152). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lareau, A., & Weininger, E. B. (2008). Class and the Transition to Adulthood. In A. Lareau, & D. Conley (Eds.), *Social Class: How Does it Work?* (pp. 118). New York City: Russell Sage Foundation.

Loewen, J. W. (1995). *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Lyon, L. (1987). *The community in urban society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Manza, J., & Brooks, C. (2008). Class and Politics. In A. Lareau, & D. Conley (Eds.), *Social Class: How Does it Work?* (pp. 201). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Monroe, K. R. (2001). Morality and a Sense of Self: The Importance of Identity and Categorization for Moral Action. *American Journal of Political Science, 45*(3), 491-507. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2669234

Monroe, K. R., Martin, A., & Ghosh, P. (2009). Politics and an Innate Moral Sense: Scientific Evidence for an Old Theory? *Political Research Quarterly, 62*(3), 614-634. Retrieved from http://ezproxy.baylor.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=43632678&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Myers, D. G. (2000). The funds, friends, and faith of happy people. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 56-67. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.56

Padelford, W., & White, D. (2009). *The Shaping of a Society's Economic Ethos: A Longitudinal Study of Individuals' Morality of Profit-Making Worldview* No. 85)Springer Science & Business Media B.V. doi:10.1007/s10551-008-9749-5

Prasad, M., Perrin, A. J., Bezila, K., Hoffman, S. G., Kindleberger, K., Manturuk, K., Powers, A. S., & Payton, A. R. (2009). The Undeserving Rich: "Moral Values" and the White Working Class. *Sociological Forum, 24*(2), 225-253. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40210400

Sack, R. D. (1999). A Sketch of a Geographic Theory of Morality. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 89*(1), 26-44. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2564033

Scase, R. (1992). *Class*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Schyns, P. (2002). Wealth of Nations, Individual Income and Life Satisfaction in 42 Countries: A Multilevel Approach. *Social Indicators Research, 60*(1/3, [Papers from the Second Annual International Society for Quality of Life Studies Conference]), 5-40. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/27527039

Shilling, C., & Mellor, P. A. (1998). Durkheim, Morality and Modernity: Collective Effervescence, Homo Duplex and the Sources of Moral Action. *The British Journal of Sociology, 49*(2), 193-209. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/591309

Smith, C. (2003). *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Spitzer, S. (1975). Toward a Marxian Theory of Deviance. *Social Problems, 22*(5), 638-651. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/799696

Trigg, R. (1971). Moral Conflict. *Mind, 80*(317), 41-55. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2252336

Voert, M. t., Felling, A., & Peters, J. (1994). The Effect of Religion on Self-Interest Morality. *Review of Religious Research, 35*(4), 302-323. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3511732

Walsh, K. C., Jennings, M. K., & Stoker, L. (2004). The Effects of Social Class Identification on Participatory Orientations towards Government. *British Journal of Political Science, 34*(3), 469-495. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4092330

Wright, E. O. (1989). *The Debate on Classes*. London ; New York: Verso.

Wright, E. O. (1997). *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*. Cambridge ; New York; Paris: Cambridge University Press; Maison des sciences de l'homme.

Wright, E. O. (2002). The Shadow of Exploitation in Weber's Class Analysis. *American Sociological Review, 67*(6), 832-853. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3088972

Wright, E. O. (Ed.). (2005). *Approaches to class analysis*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press.