



# **Class Isn't Working**

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**[www.mrs.org.uk/about/mrs-networks](http://www.mrs.org.uk/about/mrs-networks)**

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white zip-up hoodie and a white skirt, stands outdoors. She is looking off to the right with a serious expression. The background features a blue sky with scattered white clouds and a city skyline with several buildings visible in the distance. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

# The Types - Strugglers



## Strugglers

- Earning less than £15,000
- Struggling emotionally/financially
- Live in stress/chaos
- Want to change their lives but don't know how
- Low in confidence (either internally/externally)
- Disenfranchised from society

# Meet Lacy (Boston)

*'Once you are in the circle it's hard to get out.'*

*'I have a problem with men because of the way I have been abused in the past'*

*'I became a woman at the age of seven'*

*'I will put up with abuse because that is what I am used to. I have been used to it since four'*

*'Dad used to hit my mum, my mum used to hit my dad, my mum used to hit me and her partner who has been in jail for GBH used to hold me down'*

*'My ex partner stole £2000 pounds from me on Valentines day, yet I still got his name tattooed on my foot'*

Lived most of her life in a home  
Was sexually abused from age of seven

Was beaten by mum and mums boyfriend

Mum a drug addict

Raped a couple of times as a teenager

Has a son that she put in care  
Fighting to get her son back  
Is pregnant

Has eating disorder

Used to self harm and drink

Distrusts men

Only had two relationships

Abused by one boyfriend

Another boyfriend stole from her

Never taken drugs

Plays the piano

## Multiple stress points make it hard to move forward

Boyfriend  
abused her

Mum just  
died of  
cancer

Child in  
trouble  
(school)

DSS not  
come  
through

Boyfriend  
stolen from  
her

No money  
for  
gas/electric

Debt  
collector at  
door

Can't sleep  
(street  
gangs)

Can't get into  
the GP

Friend let her  
down

No money  
for birthdays

Being  
evicted

## A little bit more about them

- Little mental availability
- Can struggle to use food banks
- When use food banks can't always cook
- Park is expensive
- Town Planners place best bits away from them
- Green land is wasteland
- States don't exist as they once were
- "Nature is evil"
- Can lack skills to cook from scratch
- Not engaged with sustainability
- Often community active
  - But skills they need are adopted by Middle Class
- Creatures of habit not experimental



Areas	Str
<b>Media</b>	Leaflets Public places (Libraries)/health centers/youth clubs Outdoor: Posters, bus shelters Mainstream TV: ITV,
<b>Views on sustainability</b>	Not important no mental availability but improving environment i.e. improving estates, improving local environs
<b>Value</b>	Low prices and large multiples at good cost
<b>Purpose that works</b>	Support initiatives: Marcus Rashford, ROGO, This Girl Can Provide help on managing money/cooking from scratch Support local initiatives like youth clubs/
<b>Communication hooks</b>	Show that you care:
<b>How to drive them into your store</b>	Make them feel that they matter Make them feel that you will make their life better



# The Types – Salt of the Earth



## ‘Salt of the earth’ mainstream

- Strong work ethic
- ‘Black and white’ thinking
- Live for holidays
- Like traditional working-class activities
- Take pride in appearance/home
- Hope based around children’s happiness
- Love Britishness/nostalgia
- Savvy shoppers
- Socially conservative
- Try to keep up with Joneses
- Community minded
- Hard wired individualism



# Shelly (Feltham)

*'Life is good got a new fella and he's nice'*

*'I work everyday hard but still have fun'*

*'Just been to Turkey with my sis '*


*'My daughter and son is my life'*

*'Love to have a drink and a flutter on the football  
also go to Bingo twice a week'*

*'Money can be tight but life is far too short'*

From big family of six  
Has two children aged 17 and 14  
Was with Boyfriend for 20 years but  
he was an alcoholic  
Sold her home  
Now enjoying her life  
Tries to go to Turkey once a year

Areas	Salt of the Earth
<b>Media</b>	Leaflets Red Tops Outdoor: Posters, bus shelters, petrol stations Mainstream ITV, Sky, Facebook communities
<b>Views on sustainability</b>	Not important. Better to talk about nature, litter, animals(local) Most obedient to recycling
<b>Value</b>	Branded items at great prices, more for buck, surprise, premium experiences, helping me/my family/community, making my kids happy, best good/prices on events
<b>Purpose that works</b>	Improving the local community Litter Local sports clubs
<b>Communication hooks</b>	Fantasy/Reality: Price with emotion, Britishness, fairness, show case mum, understand pressure points, little things brighten up their day, access to luxury, keeping up with the Joneses, play to their savvy instincts



The Types –  
Aspirational working class

## Aspirational working class

- Strong drive for children to succeed
- Want to change their lives
- Old-fashioned moral compass
- More middle class interests
- Most experimental
- Trade up as well as down
- Like to eat well both at home/out



# Joan (Stoke)

*'Love love the theatre, used to watch musicals but now watch plays as well, saw Midsummer night's dream recently'*

*'I never had a good education but want my children to do well at school'*

*'I make my kids do their homework every night'*

*'Love Game of Throne but the book is better'*

*'Daughter wants to be an actress but she hates reading. Really disappointed'*

*'I love Spain as I love to cook and think their cooking is amazing'*

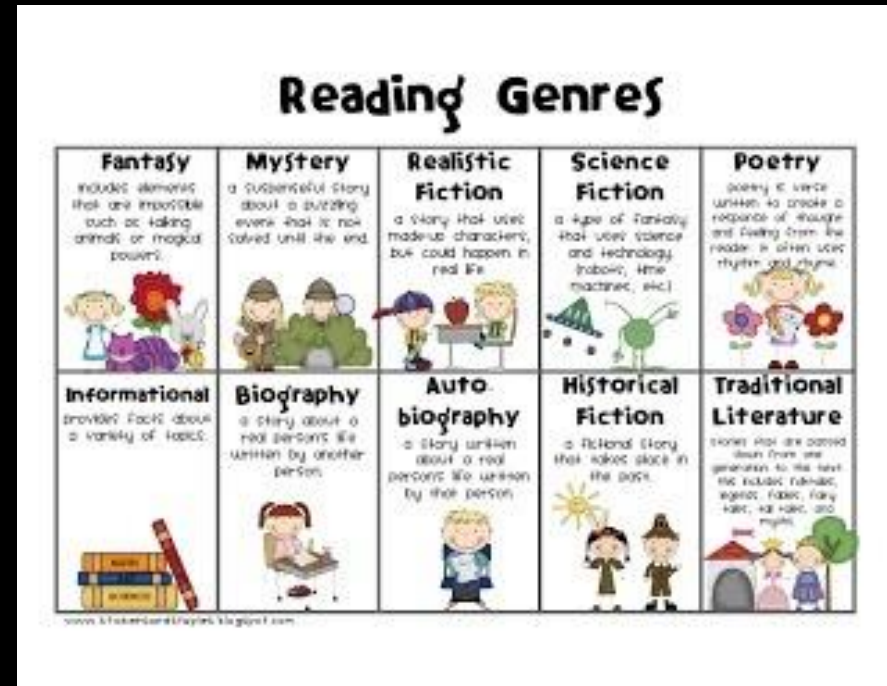
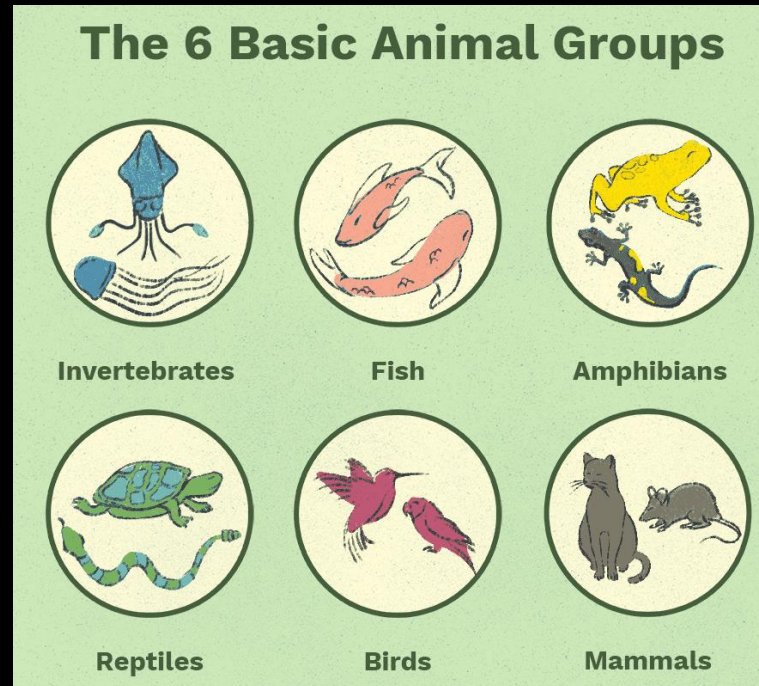
Works as a finance assistant  
Husband is a postman  
Never had great education  
Wants a better life  
Wants to move to Spain  
Push their children hard  
Oldest going to Uni  
Youngest studying acting  
Like fantasy books  
Like to play board games  
Just done wine tasting course  
Goes to the theatre twice a month

<b>Areas</b>	<b>Salt of the Earth</b>
<b>Media</b>	Mid market press, home magazines, Outdoor: Posters, bus shelters, petrol stations Mainstream ITV, Sky, Facebook communities
<b>Views on sustainability</b>	More positive about sustainability
<b>Value</b>	Premium/quality food, surprise,
<b>Purpose that works</b>	Improving the local community Improving Britain's environment
<b>Communication hooks</b>	Discovery, aspiration within limits

**Class is (now) complex.**



# Human beings like to categorize.

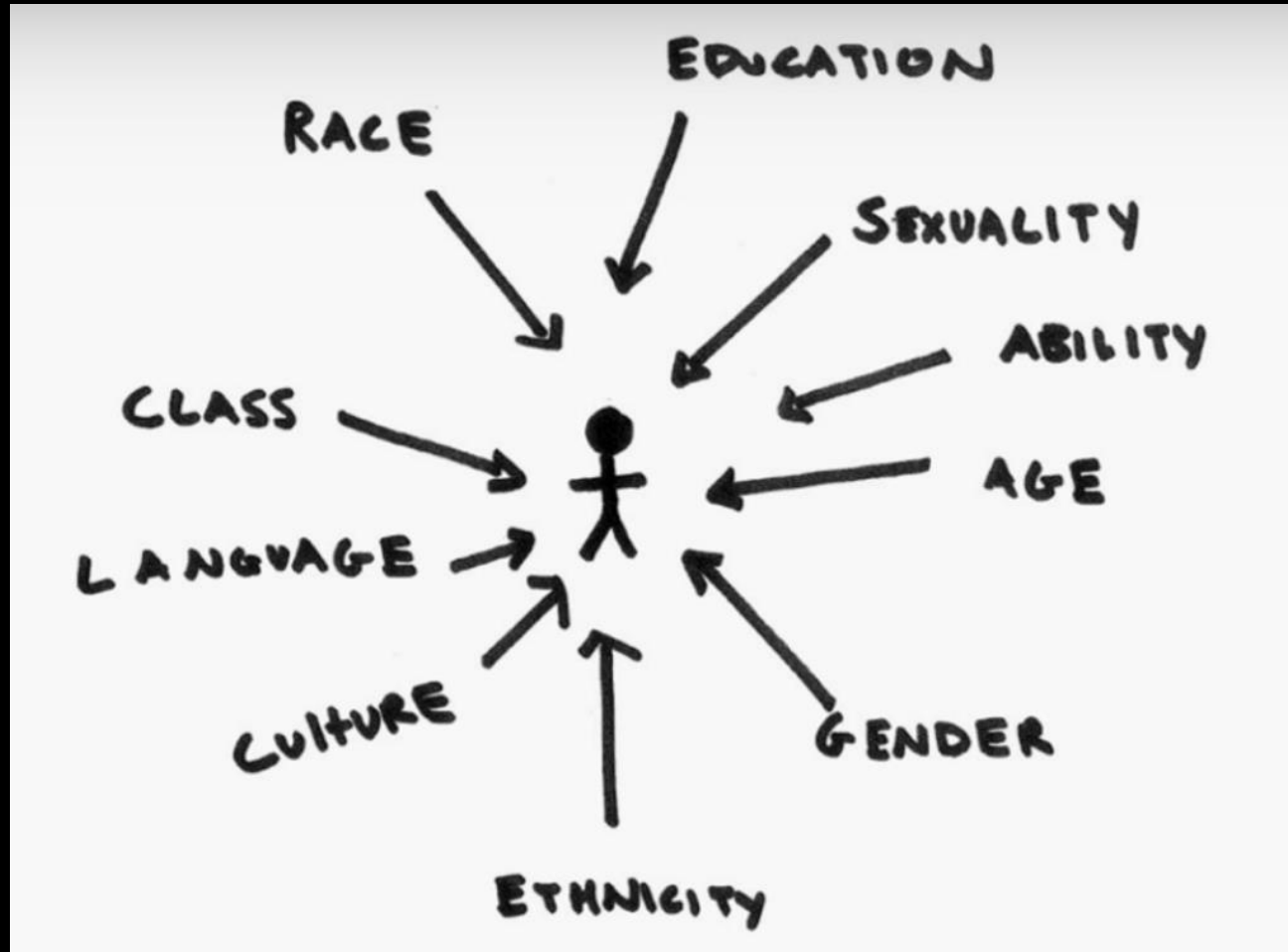


# And a long history of categorising ourselves.

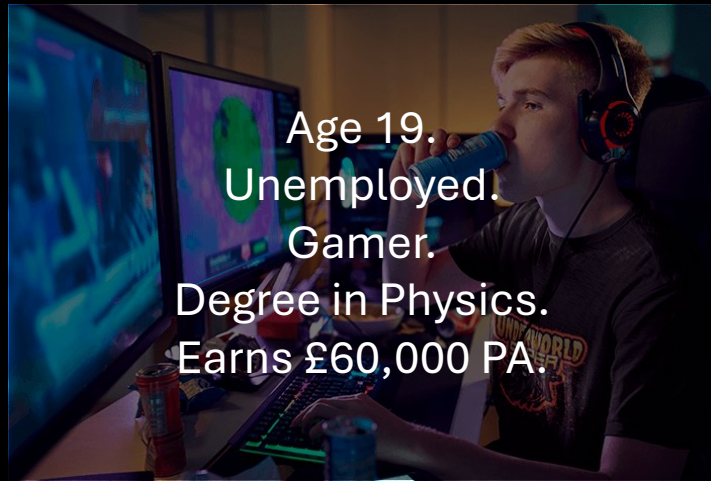




# But things have moved on...



# But things have moved on...



Age 19.  
Unemployed.  
Gamer.  
Degree in Physics.  
Earns £60,000 PA.



Age 22.  
Forex trader.  
3 A-Levels CCC.  
Earns £42,000 PA.



Age 27.  
Plumber.  
Business owner.  
NVQ.  
Earns £100,000+ PA.

# Posing issues for measurement.



Grade	Social class	Income earner's occupation
A	Upper middle class	Higher managerial, administrative or professional
B	Middle class	Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
C1	Lower middle class	Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional
C2	Skilled working class	Skilled manual workers
D	Working class	Semi and unskilled manual workers
E	Non-working class	Casual or lowest grade workers, pensioners, and others who depend on the welfare state for their income

# Posing issues for measurement.



# Posing issues for measurement.

  
Social Mobility  
Commission



**Socio-economic  
diversity and inclusion**

**Employers' toolkit: Cross-industry edition**

Originally released: February 2020  
Updated: July 2021

## INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION



 Income (22.5%)	 Employment (22.5%)	 Education, skills and training (10.5%)	 Health and disability (10.5%)
 Crime (9.5%)	 Barriers to housing and services (9.5%)	 Living environment (9.5%)	



**56%: ABC1**

**44%: C2DE**

**Census 2021, NRS Social Grade**

Based on the occupation on the household's chief income earner

**48%: identify as working class**

**36%: identify as middle class**

**YouGov 2021, Social Mobility Barometer**

Based on self-identification (n 4693)

**So where does that leave us?**

# REDEFINING CLASS

# **We have some questions we want to answer:**

- **What does it mean to be ‘working class’?**
  - **How should the ‘working classes’ best be identified?**
  - **How relevant are class definitions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**
- **to add nuance to the conversation**
- **to help develop guidelines**

**Our plan to understand the working classes:**

**1) Place-based filmed ethno in six areas to go deep:**

**Stoke-on-Trent/  
Brixton/ Blackpool/  
County Durham/  
Carlisle/ Wakefield**

**2) A nat-rep survey to go wide segment, qualify and quantify the working class**



ENTERTAINMENT  
CEX EXCHANGE  
WE BUY YOUR



CARPET & BED  
SALE  
←

Below.  
everything £1 or LESS

PECKHAM, SOUTH EAST LONDON



MRS  
SOCIAL  
EQUITY  
GROUP



**Joseph: For me, working class is like somebody who works for survival on a day-to-day basis. You go to work, they pay you your salary, whether weekly or monthly, and then you know how to manage and survive.**

*You said you wouldn't consider yourself to be working class?*

**Abdul: No. It's just with all the work I put in, all the hours and all the shit, it's still not enough. I work every day. I wake up 3:30am in the morning to go start work at five o'clock. But it's still not enough. I'm still struggling, and at my age, really and truly, I shouldn't be doing it, really.**

**Fatou: We are not working class! If you're still working you be struggling! Even if you're working, by the time the month finishes you have no money in your account. So, am I gonna say I'm working class? I'm struggling class, because I'm still struggling!**

**PECKHAM, SOUTH EAST LONDON**





**Jacob:**

There's a lot of code switching... Like, *'I need to do this. I need to sound like that. And I need to dress this way'*... I got fired from a bar job I was doing three months ago because the guy said I looked and smelled homeless. That was the reason why I got fired, even though I sorted all his stock out and I did everything for that place. I've never felt that kind of discrimination before...

...that's the sad fact is that I'm prepared to subjugate myself to certain work environments and certain people's behaviour, because it means I get to pay my rent. I think at the end of the day, that is what the working-class experiences is like, *'I'm gonna work X amount because I need to get paid. I don't care what someone's gonna say to me. I don't care how I'm gonna get treated or how I'm gonna get spoken to...*

...It's funny when you start to move out of your circles. I went to university. None of my friends went to university. All my friends did apprenticeships and now they're making so much money than myself. I've always been an open person. I was at uni, and I'm just chatting to other people.... but over time, you realise little things, like I bought a cab and I bought the first round, but then when *they* get the cab afterwards, it's *'you owe me £2.50'*, and it's like, *'Just get me a pint next time. Well, I'll get you a pint next time'*... I think the opinions of money are huge. Where it's like, *'well, you're with me, so therefore we are drinking or eating together.'* - it's such a different thing in different classes.

**PECKHAM, SOUTH EAST LONDON**







**WIGAN, GREATER MANCHESTER**



MRS  
SOCIAL  
EQUITY  
GROUP

# Initial interviews have highlighted the complexity of working class and its definition

**Class is deeply personal.** It is wrapped up in self-identity, and often something people have great pride in

**'It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at'...or is it?**

- Where someone has a working-class background, those values and principles stay with them throughout life
- Do aspirational working-class people stay working class – through the prejudice they encounter in more traditionally middle-class working environments?
- Income is a difficult way to measure class – does switching income bands affect how people feel about their class?

**Historically, working class was wrapped in traditional industries that are disappearing.** How relevant is it today?

**The majority of the population is working** – is the old “Working Class” the new “Surviving Class”?

**Is class a white issue?** As our culture becomes more diverse does class become less relevant?