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AS GCE SOCIOLOGY

G671/01/SM Exploring Socialisation, Culture and Identity

PRE-RELEASE STIMULUS MATERIAL

JUNE 2013



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INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

- This document consists of 4 pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

**Heath, A F, et al (2007) “Who do we think we are? The decline of traditional social identities”
London: Sage.**

Traditional social identities such as those based on social class are widely believed to be declining in post-industrial societies which are becoming increasingly globalised. Even if people still uphold a traditional identity, that identity may now have less influence on their attitudes and behaviour than it used to forty years ago. One of the key aims of this research was to measure change in the level of subjective social class identity. Another key aim was to assess whether social class identities are ‘given’ or whether they are increasingly ‘chosen’.

In order to make comparisons over time, Heath et al contributed some questions to the 2005 British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey which had originally been asked in the 1964 British Election Study. They also composed some additional questions relating to new social identities.

The BSA survey collects quantitative data annually on a range of social issues. The survey has two parts: one administered by an interviewer (structured interview) and one left for self-completion and later returned (structured questionnaire). The structured interviews were conducted by Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) where respondents were asked to input answers to sensitive questions directly into the interviewer’s laptop computer.

The sample was gained using random stratified sampling taken from the Postcode Address File. This technique tries to ensure that everyone has an equal chance of taking part in the survey and that the results are representative of the British population. In total 4268 surveys were administered.

The interview questions about social class in the BSA survey were mainly closed-ended or fixed choice questions, such as:

Do you ever think of yourself as belonging to any particular class? YES or NO

If YES, which class?

If NO, most people say that they belong to either the middle class or to the working class.

Do you ever think of yourself as being in one of these classes? YES or NO

If YES, which class?

Heath et al also carried out 42 unstructured, follow-up interviews with selected respondents from the 2005 BSA survey to gather qualitative data. The aim of these interviews was to further investigate respondents’ identities and to explore the processes linking identities and behaviour.

The BSA survey data showed that the balance between those calling themselves middle class and those calling themselves working class had changed. In 1964, for every person calling themselves middle class there were 2.4 who said they were working class. In 2005, for every person calling themselves middle class there were only 1.25 who said they were working class.

In relation to the BSA survey question opposite, the findings were:

Do you ever think of yourself as belonging to any particular class? (percentage of respondents)

	1964	2005
<i>Unprompted: middle class</i>	16.3	18.7
<i>Unprompted: working class</i>	42.8	26.1
Total unprompted	59.1	44.8

40

<i>Prompted: middle class</i>	12.2	16.6
<i>Prompted: working class</i>	22.9	32.1
Total prompted	35.1	48.7

45

<i>Did not identify</i>	5.8	6.5
Total	100	100

Overall, Heath et al concluded that class had become less important as a source of identity. People who feel a sense of belonging to their class differ little in their attitudes, values and voting behaviour from those who have a nominal sense of class identity or no class identity at all. 50

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