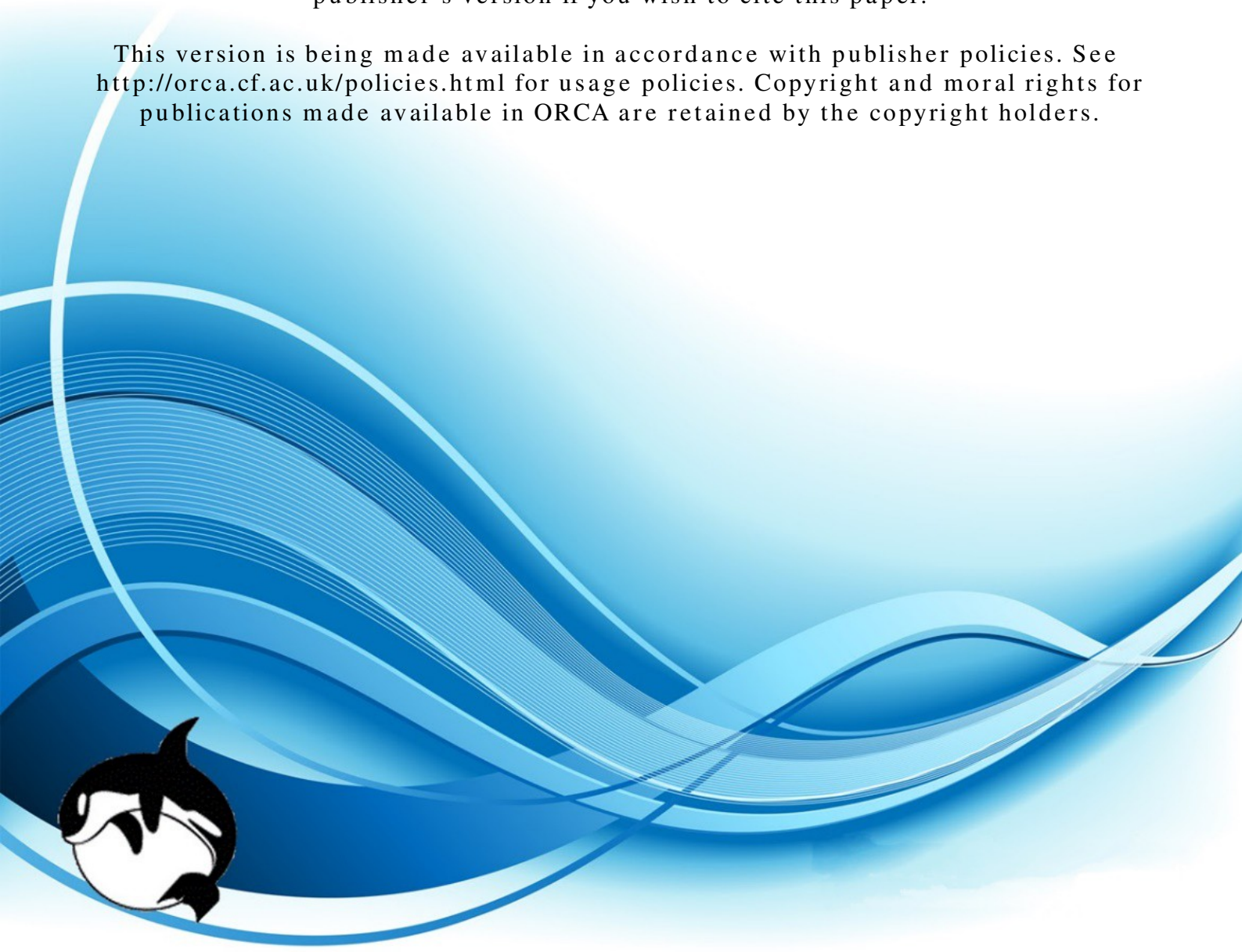

Title: Socioeconomic status and the structure of the self-concept

Short title: SES and the self-concept

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Abstract:

Individuals have a myriad of potential identities that they can use to define who they are, yet little research has investigated which types of identities people tend to prioritize within their self-concepts, and how this may vary across individuals. We analyse data from two large UK social surveys (*Ns* = 16,966 and 44,903) that assessed the importance respondents attached to various identities within their self-concepts, and find that social class plays a crucial role. Our results show that respondents attached high importance to identities that are indicative of their social class (income, education, and professional), and at least as much importance as they gave to identities more commonly studied by psychologists (such as ethnicity, nationality, or gender). Furthermore, respondents' objective social class was one of the strongest predictors of the importance they attached to different types of identities: Higher class respondents placed greater importance on identities that are indicative of their social class, but less importance on identities based on basic demographics, chosen communities, or their sociocultural orientation. Our results suggest that social class plays an important role in structuring the self-concept, and that researchers should pay more attention to the importance of social class to self and identity processes.

Keywords:

Social class; socioeconomic status; identity; self-concept

Social class and the structure of the self-concept

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self-concepts, and how this may vary across individuals. We analyse data from two large UK social surveys (*Ns* = 16,966 and 44,903) that assessed the importance respondents attached to various identities within their self-concepts, and find that social class plays a crucial role. Our results show that respondents attached high importance to identities that are indicative of their social class (income, education, and professional), and at least as much importance as they gave to identities more commonly studied by psychologists (such as ethnicity, nationality, or gender). Furthermore, respondents' objective social class was one of the strongest predictors of the importance they attached to different types of identities: Higher class respondents placed greater importance on identities that are indicative of their social class, but less importance on identities based on basic demographics, chosen communities, or their sociocultural orientation. Our results suggest that social class plays an important role in structuring the self-concept, and that researchers should pay more attention to the importance of social class to self and identity processes.

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Wordcount: 6,016 excluding abstract, tables, figures, and references.

Introduction

Individuals can form identities based on almost anything that is self-relevant (James, 1890). They structure these identities within their self-concept by affording them different levels of importance, such that some are more central to their overall self-definition than others (Vignoles et al., 2006). Although researchers have investigated a range of factors that influence the subjective importance that individuals place on their different identities, there has been surprisingly little research that has investigated which *types* of identities people tend to prioritize within their self-concepts, or whether this varies across individuals.

In this article, we argue that *social class identities* – identities based on the social and economic factors that determines one's standing in society – are likely to be given high levels of subjective importance by individuals and used as a meaningful way to categorize and define themselves and others. We also expect that those who have higher social class will place greater levels of subjective importance on their social class identities because they derive status from them, which satisfies a range of psychological needs. We test these predictions in analyses of two large UK datasets.

Social Class as a Basis for Meaningful Identities

According to self-categorisation theory, social class will be a meaningful and useful way of categorising people and used as a basis for identity if it helps to explain prominent social differences between individuals and groups, and readily comes to the mind of the perceiver (Turner et al., 1987). Social class is related to political orientation and engagement (Persson, 2013), social attitudes and trust (Easterbrook, Kuppens, and Manstead, 2015), choice of marriage partners (Hou and Myles, 2008), and the cultural products that people consume (Bourdieu, 1984; Reeves, Gilbert, & Holman, 2015; Snibbe and Markus, 2005), suggesting it is indeed a meaningful and useful social category. Moreover, people are able to rapidly and accurately perceive and categorise others based on their social class from a short video of their non-verbal behaviours, their online profile, or listening to a recording of isolated words they have spoken (Kraus, Park, and Tan, 2017).

People do indeed form meaningful and subjectively important identities based on their social class (Surridge, 2007) and level of education (Stubager, 2009), and hold stereotypes about others based on their perceptions of their education level (Spruyt & Kuppens, 2014). Furthermore, economic inequality has risen and social mobility decreased over the last half-

century (Machin & Vignoles, 2005), which amplifies the differences between people who differ in social class (Heiserman & Simpson, 2017). We therefore expect that people's social class offers useful and salient social categorisations and forms the basis for subjectively important identities; identities that, we argue, are likely to be at least as important as identities that are more often studied by psychologists (e.g., gender, ethnicity). We test this prediction in the analyses reported below.

Social Class and Meritocracy

Social class is usually measured by assessing an individual's income, education level and/or occupation. These attributes tend to be perceived as individual rather than collective, and are used to rank individuals in a hierarchy (Kraus, Tan, & Tannenbaum, 2013; Van Der Waal, Achterberg, & Houtman, 2007; van Eijk, 2013). This is somewhat different to the traditional understanding of social class groups, which are perceived as homogeneous groupings of people who share similar economic circumstances and histories, life opportunities, and cultural tastes (Bourdieu, 1984).

Traditional social class groupings have been important sources of identity throughout history, were often central to political movements (e.g., labour and socialist movements, communism), and were closely tied to people's political and social attitudes (Manstead, 2018; Park et al., 2013). However, changes in UK government policy since the 1980s have brought about social changes that marginalized the working class and eroded the positive and community-based aspects of working class identities (Jones, 2011). Simultaneously, social classes (based on occupation) have become less homogeneous in their social attitudes over the last 30 years in Britain (Park et al., 2013), which is likely to reduce the clarity and salience of these traditional social class groupings (Leach et al., 2008), and promote perceptions that status differences are individual rather than collective attributes (Jetten et al., 2013; Kraus et al., 2012). Thus, although traditional class groupings may have become less salient in people's subjective identities, those aspects of class that can be seen as individualising – such as income, education, and occupation – may well have increased in importance.

The traditional group-based conceptualisation of social class is also at odds with the dominant contemporary ideology of meritocracy, which holds that an individual's status is determined primarily by their merit; a combination of ability and motivation. Scholars have

shown that meritocratic beliefs are associated with beliefs in individual autonomy and self-interest, and a downplaying of group-based attributions for an individual's status (Horberg, Kraus, & Keltner, 2013; McCoy & Major, 2007; Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2001; Sengupta, Greaves, Osborne, & Sibley, 2017; van Eijk, 2013). People often perceive traditional, group-based social class as operating against individual autonomy, binding individuals to their family's history and social class, and limiting their opportunities for social mobility (Savage et al., 2001; van Eijk, 2013). Indeed, despite the fact that people recognise the structuring power of social class within the societies they live in, they tend to deny that their social class is relevant to their own lives, or that it limits their life opportunities (Savage et al., 2001).

This leads to the intriguing possibility that people will place subjective importance on their social class identities that are perceived as due to individual merit – education, income, and occupation – yet downplay the importance of group-based social class identities. This is not to suggest that social class groups are unimportant to people's lives – indeed, we argue quite the opposite – but rather that, due to a dominant meritocratic ideology, people are likely to place importance on identities that reflect their social class only if those identities are perceived to be under their own control. Such identities offer the possibility of increasing status in the future through their own merit (Cheung, 2016), or in the case of high status individuals suggest that their high status is due to personal merit rather than their family's social class. We will investigate the relative importance of a series of social class labels in our analyses. It is important to note that in the current research we are investigating the *subjective* importance individuals place on different aspects of social class. A lower subjective importance for a specific aspect of class does not imply that this is less objectively significant to their lives more generally.

Socioeconomic Status and the Importance of Social Class Identities

Although we expect identities associated with social class to be important self-definitions for everyone, we anticipate that they will be more important for those individuals with higher rather than lower social class. This is because higher-class identities that indicate higher status are likely to be more psychologically satisfying and thus more subjectively important to people's self-definitions (Vignoles, 2011).

Individuals who have high incomes, are highly educated, and work in prestigious occupations are afforded higher social status within capitalist societies compared to individuals with lower incomes, less education, and less prestigious occupations (Tannock, 2008). Thus, identities tied to one's income, education level, and occupation are likely to be strongly associated with a subjective sense of status, which in turn is associated with a sense of self-esteem. Indeed, research has shown that people derive self-esteem from identities that provide them with a sense of social status (Becker et al., 2014), and that they place greater importance on identities that provide them with a sense of self-esteem (Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker, 2014; Easterbrook and Vignoles, 2012; Stets and Burke, 2000; Vignoles et al., 2006).

Researchers have also argued that the desire for status is a fundamental human motive and strongly related to self-esteem (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland, 2015; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This is in line with the motive for self-enhancement, which drives people to emphasise positive aspects of themselves (Alicke and Sedikides, 2009). Consistent with this, research has found that individuals who have higher levels of education place more subjective importance on their educational-identities, and more education-based intergroup bias, compared to individuals with lower levels of education (Kuppens et al., 2015; 2018). Those with higher social class are therefore likely to perceive the identities that are indicative of their social class as demonstrating their high status, and thus award those identities greater importance within their self-concept.

This reasoning suggests that people with high social class will value those identities that afford them high status—their professions, incomes, and education level—*at the expense of* identities based on less motivationally satisfying aspects of their lives. In contrast, people who hold lower social class positions may deemphasize their motivationally frustrating social class identities and instead prioritise other, more satisfying identities. Indeed, research has shown that people from lower class backgrounds suffer from stereotype threat in achievement domains (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Spencer & Castano, 2007), leading to disengagement and withdrawal (Hall, Zhao, & Shafir, 2014; Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016), and that people with low levels of education defensively marginalise education-based identities (Kuppens, Easterbrook, Spears, & Manstead, 2015; see also Stubager, 2009).

This line of argument is consistent with two social psychological approaches to social class – the sociocultural approach (Stephens & Townsend, 2013) and the socio-cognitive approach

(Kraus et al., 2012). Both approaches argue that that class contexts shape the self-concept in ways that result in lower class individuals deriving their identities and sense of agency from interdependent and collective aspects of their lives (such as family and community), and higher class individuals deriving their identities and agency from independent and individualised aspects of their lives (such as their personal achievements; see also Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). These approaches are in line with our above argument that those with higher class will place more importance on individualising social class identities (those which they consider themselves to have control over: those based on their education, income, occupation), whereas those with lower class will place more importance on other, more collective identities, predictions that we test in the current analyses.

Different Types of Identities

Although our main focus is on the subjective importance of different identities, we also investigated whether the range of identities included in our analyses could be condensed and understood as a smaller number of clusters or *identity types*. This allows us to investigate whether respondents treat different social class identities in a similar manner, suggesting they may be seen as one *type* of *identity*.

Although little work has directly investigated this, there is some theory and evidence to suggest that this will be the case. The multiple self-aspect framework (MSAF; McConnell, 2011) proposes that people have multiple identities within their self-concepts, and that the identities that share particular attributes (e.g., caring, hard-working) are affectively connected within the self-system. Indeed, McConnell and colleagues (McConnell, Rydell, & Brown, 2009) have empirically demonstrated that feedback about an activated self-aspect alters the evaluations of the self-aspects that are idiosyncratically related to it through shared attributes. Thus, it may be the case that identities linked to social class are connected within the self-system and form a distinct identity type. We empirically investigate whether a range of different identities (not limited to class identities) can be categorised into meaningful types. This leads to another interesting question that we address in our analyses, namely whether an individual's characteristics and objective social class predict the relative importance of different identity types (beyond those tied to class).

The Present Analyses

We investigate the role of social class in identity processes and the self-concept by analysing data from two large-scale social surveys of UK adults in which respondents were asked to rate the subjective importance of a range of self-relevant identities to their sense of who they are. The list of identities included some commonly studied by psychologists (e.g., nationality, gender, ethnicity, religion), some less frequently studied (e.g., family, age), and those indicative of a person's social class (occupation, profession, education, social class).

We first investigated the relative importance of all identities to people's self-concepts, noting which were given relatively high versus low subjective importance. Next, we conducted exploratory factor analyses on the list of identities to examine whether we could identify different identity types, and whether these included those based on social class. This yielded meaningful factors, and so, in a last step, we specified path models that investigated whether an objective indicator of respondents' class, as well as their demographic characteristics, predicted the relative importance they attached to the different types of identities.

We predicted that, on average, individualising social class identities – those based on income, education and occupation – would be relatively important within individuals' self-concepts, whereas collective social class identities would not be. We also predicted that respondents with higher social class would attach greater importance to the individualising social class identities, possibly at the expense of other identities unrelated to class.

Method

We analysed data from two large British surveys: the Citizenship Survey (CS; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010); and Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study (USS; University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research and National Centre for Social Research, 2013).

Participants and design

CS. The CS is a (now discontinued) biannual survey of a regionally representative sample of around 10,000 adults in England and Wales, with an ethnic minority boost sample of around 5,000. We analyzed the most recent data, collected via interviews in 2010-2011. The full sample was N = 16,966, with 54% males, 55% Christians, 56% Whites, and 24% Asians (respondents of any Asian decent), with M_{age} = 46 (SD_{age} = 18).

USS. The USS is an annual longitudinal household panel survey that began in 2009. We report analyses of data from Wave 5 (2013-14), the more recent of the two waves in which the majority of respondents answered our focal questions. Wave 5 has a total sample of around 48,000 individuals living in the UK, consisting of a general population sample of around 32,000, an ethnic minority boost sample of around 5,000, and a sample from other existing panels of around 11,000. Data were collected via both face-to-face interviews and self-completion questionnaires. After taking account of missing data, the full sample for Wave 5 was N = 44,903, with 54% males and 76.4% White British respondents, with M_{age} = 48 (SD_{age} = 19).

Measures

Identity importance. Both the CS and the USS included a question about the extent to which respondents incorporated different identities into their sense of self. Respondents were asked how important these identities were "to your sense of who you are." Responses were given on a scale from 1 to 4.

CS. The CS included a broad range of identities: profession, ethnic background, religion, national identity, where one lives, interests, family, family origin, gender, age/life stage, income, education, and social class.

USS. The USS included a shorter list of identities: profession, education, ethnic background, political beliefs, family, gender, and age/life stage.

Respondents' social class. Both the USS and CS include indicators of respondents' income, education level, and occupational social class based on their occupation. We aimed to follow previous research (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Korndörfer, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2015) by taking the average of these three indicators as our measure of respondents' social class. However, in both datasets, less than half of respondents had usable data for the occupational social class variable. We therefore took the average of education and income as our measure of social class, details of which are as follows.

CS. Education level was operationalized as respondents' highest educational qualification, in terms of the following 5 categories: no formal qualifications; GCSE or equivalent (a secondary education qualification typically gained at age 16); A-Level (an advanced secondary education qualification typically gained at age 18); a higher education qualification below a bachelors' degree; a bachelors' degree or postgraduate qualification or equivalent. Income was divided into 15 categories ranging from no income to £100,000 (approximately US$125,000) or higher. We standardized these indicators and computed their mean for our measure of social class (r = .38).

USS. Education was operationalized as respondents' highest educational qualification, using the same categories as in the CS. Income was measured in pounds sterling and reflected total gross monthly income. We standardized these two indicators and then computed their mean for our measure of social class (r = .32).

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Demographic variables. We included the following demographic variables in the appropriate analyses. The descriptive statistics for all variables are shown in Table 1.

CS: gender (male vs. female), marital status (married or civil partnership vs. single), age, religion (Christian, Muslim, no religion, other religions), and ethnicity (White, Asian, Black, Mixed, Other).

USS: gender (male vs. female), age, marital status (married or civil partnership vs. single), and ethnicity (White, Asian, Black, Mixed, Other). Although a religion variable was included in the USS, less than half of the respondents had usable data for this variable, so we omitted it from our analyses, in order to maximize our sample size.

Results

The Relative Importance of Different Identities

CS. Table 2 and Figure 1 show the mean importance of each identity. Because of our large samples most identities differed significantly in average importance but in some cases the differences are very small and not especially meaningful. Family was the most important identity and clearly more important than all the others. This was followed by nationality, interests, gender, education, and profession, which differed only slightly from each other. Religion and social class were the least important identities and received meaningfully lower importance ratings than all other identities.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

USS. We conducted the same analyses with the more limited list of identities included in the USS data. Table 3 and Figure 2 show the mean importance of these identities. Family was by far the most important identity, followed by gender, occupation, age/life stage, and education, which did not differ meaningfully from each other. Ethnicity and political beliefs were the least important. It is noteworthy that profession was, on average, the third most important identity to respondents.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Conclusion. These results suggest that individualised social class identities (income, education, and profession) are, on average, as important to people as the most commonly studied identities in psychology (gender and national/ethnic identity). Also in line with our expectations is the finding that social class per se was marginalized as an identity.

Exploring Identity Types

We next investigated whether the identities could be clustered into particular types by conducting exploratory factor analysis with principal axis factoring and direct oblimin rotation on each dataset.

CS. The initial analyses indicated a relative drop in eigenvalues after the fourth factor so we specified a 4-factor solution in a subsequent analysis, the results of which are shown in Table 4.[1] We interpreted the factors using only items with loadings > .3. Factor 1 consisted of identities related to chosen communities (place, interests). Factor 2 consisted of identities indicative of sociocultural orientation (ethnic background, religion, national identity, origin). Factor 3 consisted of identities based on basic demographics (age, gender). Factor 4 consisted of individualised social class identities (education, income, profession). The factors were all moderately to strongly related ($r_{F1, F2}$ = .46; $r_{F1, F3}$ = .53; $r_{F1, F4}$ = .49, $r_{F2, F3}$ = .48, $r_{F2, F4}$ = .29, $r_{F3, F4}$ = .42),[2] indicating that individuals who found the identities of one factor important tended to also find the identities of other factors important.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

USS. The initial analyses indicated a similar drop in eigenvalues after the fourth factor, so we specified a 4-factor solution in a subsequent analysis, although this produced only three meaningful factors. We therefore ran a further analysis extracting three factors, the results of which are shown in Table 5. We again only interpreted factors based on items with loadings > .3, which resulted in three substantive factors.[3] Factor 1 consisted of identities based on basic demographics (gender, age). Factor 2 consisted of individualised social class identities (profession and education). Factor 3 consisted of identities indicative of sociocultural orientation (ethnic background, political beliefs). The factors were all

[1] We used this criterion rather than eigenvalues > 1 for two reasons: Doing so gave more interpretable results, which is an important basis for factor extraction (Sharma, 1996; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), and it guards against the "much more severe error" of specifying too few factors compared to specifying too many (p.278, Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999).

[2] For the sake of clarity and consistency, we ensured that the correlations were computed from factors on which higher scores reflect greater levels of subjective importance.

[3] As can be seen in Table 5, there was one cross-loading > .3: ethnicity on the demographic-identities factor. We included this item in the sociocultural-identity factor based on its stronger loading, and because of the consistency between the CS and USS. However, it is worth noting that the interpretation of the demographic-identity factor would not change if ethnicity were included.

strongly related ($r_{F1, F2}$ = .41; $r_{F1, F3}$ = .52; $r_{F2, F3}$ = .42), again indicating that individuals who found the identities of one factor important tended to also find the identities of the other factors important.

[TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

Conclusions. The results from both the CS and USS suggest that the importance respondents place on their identities differs depending on whether those identities are related to their chosen *communities,* are based on their *basic demographics*, reflect their *sociocultural* orientations, or are indicative of their *social class*. Respondents may, therefore, understand and categorize their identities in terms of these different types, and use these identity-types to structure their self-concept. To our knowledge, this is the first evidence of such a structure.

Predicting the Relative Importance of Different Types of Identities

We next investigated whether the subjective importance of these different types of identities was systematically related to respondents' characteristics. In particular, we aimed to test our hypothesis that social class identities would be particularly important for higher class individuals.

CS. We created indices of these four types of identities by taking the mean of the items that loaded > .3 on each meaningful factor. We computed a chosen-communities-identity index from the mean importance of the place and interest identities (r = .38), a basic demographics-identity index from the mean importance of the gender and age identities (r = .55), a social class-identity index from the mean importance of income, profession, and education identities (α = .60), and a sociocultural-identity index from the mean importance of ethnicity, nationality, religion, and origin identities (α = .69). We then specified a path model in MPlus version 8 using maximum likelihood estimation, in which the social class composite and all demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, religion, ethnicity) predicted the subjective importance of these four identity indices. The results are shown in Table 6.

[TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE]

Respondents' social class was one of the strongest predictors of the importance of social class-identities, basic demographics-identities, and sociocultural-identities, but it was unrelated to chosen-community-identities. Respondents with higher class placed less importance on their sociocultural- and demographic-identities, but considerably more importance on their social class-identities, compared to respondents with lower social class. Figure 3 visualizes the association between social class (expressed in quintiles, for visual clarity) and the four identity indices. The pattern is clear: As social class increases, social

class-identities become progressively more important, whereas demographic-identities and sociocultural-identities become progressively less important. Chosen-community-identities, by contrast, are fairly stable across the social class quintiles. At the lowest social class quintile, social class identities are in fact the least important type of identity.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

In addition to the reliable effects of social class, there were also strong effects of being a member of an ethnic minority on the importance attached to the different identity indices: Respondents who reported their ethnicity as Asian or Black attached much more importance to their sociocultural-identities, confirming past research (Lücken & Simon, 2005), but also to their demographic- and social class-identities. Furthermore, older respondents attached more importance to their sociocultural identities, whereas younger respondents tended to attach more importance to their social class-identities. Respondents with no religion attached much less importance to their sociocultural identities, and tended to attach less importance to the other identities as well. Female respondents attached more importance to their demographic-identities, and slightly more importance to the other identities as well. Overall, there were very few strong predictors of the importance of community-identities, possibly reflecting the highly personalized nature of these identities.

These results suggest that social class plays a central role in determining the subjective importance people attach to different types of identities within their self-concept. Strikingly, higher social class is not only associated with an increase in the importance of social class identities, but also a *decrease* in the importance of other types of identities, specifically those reflecting basic demographics and one's sociocultural orientations.

USS. We followed the same procedure for our analyses of the USS data. We first created indices of the three types of identities by taking the mean of items that loaded >.3 on the three factors. We created a basic demographic-identities index by computing the mean of the age/life stage and gender identities (r = .59); a social class-identities index by computing the mean of the profession and education identities (r = .48); and a sociocultural-identities index by computing the mean of the ethnic background and political beliefs identities (r = .35). We then created a path model in which the social class composite and all demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, ethnicity) predicted the subjective importance of the three identity indices. The results are shown in Table 7.

[TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE]

Social class was a strong predictor of social class-identities, and a weaker predictor of demographic-identities: Those with higher social class attached more importance to their

social class-identities and less importance to their demographic-identities, compared to those with lower social class. There was also a weaker effect of social class on sociocultural identities: Respondents with higher social class tended to attach less importance to their sociocultural identities. Figure 4 visualizes the association between social class (expressed in quintiles) and the three identity indices. The pattern is remarkably clear for social class-identities and demographic-identities: As social class increases, social class-identities become more important, whereas demographic-identities and—to a lesser degree—sociocultural identities, become less important.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Once again, and in line with previous research (Lücken and Simon, 2005), there were also strong effects associated with being a member of an ethnic minority: Asian and Black respondents attached much more importance to their sociocultural-identities, and more importance to their demographic- and social class-identities. Furthermore, and replicating the CS results, older respondents attached more importance to their sociocultural-identities, female respondents attached more importance to their demographic-identities, and younger respondents attached more importance to their social class-identities. Overall, respondents attached less importance to their sociocultural-identities.

Discussion

Our analyses of data from two very large samples of UK adults clearly demonstrate the important role that social class plays in structuring the self-concept. We found that identities that are indicative of one's social class were on average subjectively important to people, and overall at least as important as identities (e.g., ethnicity, nationality, religion) that are more commonly studied by psychologists. This suggests that researchers have tended to focus on only a few of the identities that are subjectively important to people, and much less on those related to social class. The reasons for this relative neglect are unclear, but our results suggest that a shift in research attention is warranted.

The results from our exploratory factor analyses demonstrated that we could identify meaningful types of identities within the list of identities we were analysing, suggesting that respondents treated or understood certain types of identity in similar ways. We found that the list of identities could be condensed into social class-identities, basic demographic-identities, sociocultural-identities, and chosen community-identities. Furthermore, we found that respondent's social class was an important predictor of the subjective importance people

placed on these different identity types: Respondents with higher social class attached more importance to their social class-identities, as predicted, but *less* importance to their basic demographic-identities and their sociocultural-identities. As outlined in the introduction, this is likely to be because identities indicative of higher social class provide a sense of social status and self-esteem, which are psychologically satisfying and motivate identity construction (Becker et al., 2014; Vignoles, 2011), and because individuals from different social classes have different self-construals (Kraus et al., 2012; Stephens & Townsend, 2013). However, direct tests of these predictions are needed before we can draw firm conclusions regarding this. Our analyses do show, however, that social class is strongly associated with the structure of an individual's self-concept, and the importance placed on different types of identities. We can make these conclusions with confidence because they are drawn from our analyses of two datasets that were large and diverse in both the socioeconomic and ethnic background of the respondents, and so were well suited to addressing these issues.

Although social class was the most novel of the factors predicting the importance of specific types of identities, it was not the only factor. We also found that ethnic minorities attached more importance to all of their identity types than ethnic majority members, although this was particularly pronounced for their sociocultural identities (in line with Kuhn & McPartland, 1954; Lücken & Simon, 2005). These findings are particularly interesting when one considers how people cope with different forms of low status: While ethnic minorities *prioritize* their low-status ethnic identities, those with lower social class tend to *marginalize* their social class identities. Drawing on Jetten and colleagues (2013), we suggest that this is because of differences in the perceived conditions surrounding their low status. Ethnic groups often perceive their low status as illegitimate and their group boundaries as impermeable, both of which encourage collective responses to low status. However, the dominant meritocratic discourse prevalent in British society leads people to perceive the boundaries between different social class positions as permeable – encouraging people to strive to enhance their own social class – and legitimizes the low status of those with lower social class. These conditions encourage individual rather than collective responses to low status and discrimination (Jetten et al., 2013; Tajfel and Turner, 1979), which may account for the differences in how members of low status groups react to their low status. These provocative findings should fuel future research in this area.

Respondents reported that their social class group identity was the least important out of all the identities studied. However, individualised aspects of social class — income, education level, and occupation — were subjectively important. As outlined in the introduction, we argue that this reflects current social discourses in Britain, and probably other countries as well. Prior to the 1980s, social class identities, and particularly working-class identities, were prominent and positively valued. However, changes in government policy brought about social changes that marginalized the working class and eroded the positive and community-based aspects of working class identities (Jones, 2011). This was epitomized by John Prescott—the then deputy leader of the traditionally working-class Labour Party—who, in 1997, claimed "we're all middle class now," effectively declaring traditional class groupings redundant in British society. The prominence of collective class identities has been replaced by a strong focus on individual achievements and autonomy, and societies have come to value those with high levels of income, education and occupation (Grusky & Carolina, 2008; Kuppens et al., 2015; Spruyt & Kuppens, 2015). Our findings appear to reflect these discourses that prioritize personal achievements while marginalizing collective conceptions of social class.

Our results suggest that the impact of social class on self-related cognitions may have been underestimated in past research and should be a focus of future research in the area. For example, it may be that social class differences in the identities prioritized within the self-concept shape reactions to societal events in predictable ways; those in lower class positions may react more strongly to a national threat because of the relative importance they place on their sociocultural identities, whereas those in higher class positions may react more strongly to an economic threat due to the relative importance of their social class-identities. An event that affects one identity may also affect other identities of the same type. For example, threats to an ethnic identity may also be experienced as a threat to other sociocultural-identities, such as national or political identity. Yet another possibility is that the different identity types are more or less correlated with each other among certain groups of people. These are interesting possibilities that future research could address.

It is important to acknowledge some limitations to our approach. Although we analysed data from two large samples, the lists of identities included in the original surveys were limited. There may be more dimensions – beyond social class, basic demographics, sociocultural, and chosen communities – that structure people's self-concepts. Moreover, the identity-type

composites that we created based on the EFA would benefit from further validation. Furthermore, there were some identities that did not load onto any of the factors. Family identity, for example, was the most subjectively important identity to respondents but did not load uniquely on any of our dimensions. Future research should investigate family identity in more detail, including the issue of how it is represented within the self-concept. Furthermore, place identity was relatively unimportant to respondents, yet where one lives could well be perceived as an indicator of one's social class. Future research should investigate how place identities relate to social class. Finally, whereas exploratory factor analysis is a useful tool for exploratory analyses, future research should build on this by conducting confirmatory analyses and using alternative techniques such as multidimensional scaling to build on the current work.

Despite these limitations, we believe that our findings represent a significant advance within the study of self and identity by placing social class at its core. We hope that self and identity researchers will follow our lead by investigating the pivotal role that social class and social class-identities play in people's cognitions, motivations, affect, and behaviours.

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TABLES

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics for the CS and USS data*

		CS			USS	
Variable	**N**	**Mean/%**	**SD**	**N**	**Mean/%**	**SD**
Education	13584			40575		
No qualifications		23%			15%	
GCSE		23%			23%	
A levels		15%			24%	
Higher education		11%			12%	
Degree		29%			26%	
Income	14671	4.63	3.15	44903	1683.89	1654.94
Females (vs. males)	16966	54%		44903	54%	
Married (vs. single)	16966	47%		40952	52%	
Age	16966	46.45	18.22	44903	47.72	18.75

Continued…

Ethnicity		16962	42249	
	White	56%		85%
	Asian	25%		09%
	Black	12%		04%
	Mixed	03%		02%
	Other	04%		00%
Religion		16948		
	Christian	55%		
	No religion	14%		
	Muslim	21%		
	Other religions	10%		

Table 2: *The subjective importance of different identities included in the CS. Cohen's* d *shows the effect size for subjective importance placed on the identity in comparison to the identity listed immediately below.*

Identity	Importance	Cohen's *d*
Family	3.85	0.84
National identity	3.33	0.08
Interests	3.27	0.00
Gender	3.27	0.03
Education	3.24	0.02
Profession	3.22	0.05
Origin	3.18	0.03
Income	3.14	0.01
Ethnic background	3.15	0.08
Age/Life stage	3.08	0.11
Place	2.98	0.17
Religion	2.81	0.08
Social class	2.73	-

Identity	Importance	Cohen's *d*
Family	3.85	0.84
National identity	3.33	0.08
Interests	3.27	0.00
Gender	3.27	0.03
Education	3.24	0.02
Profession	3.22	0.05
Origin	3.18	0.03
Income	3.14	0.01
Ethnic background	3.15	0.08
Age/Life stage	3.08	0.11
Place	2.98	0.17
Religion	2.81	0.08
Social class	2.73	-

Table 3: *The subjective importance of different identities included in the USS. Cohen's* d *shows the effect size for subjective importance placed on the identity in comparison to the identity listed immediately below.*

Identity	**Importance**	**Cohen's *d***
Family	3.74	0.84
Gender	3.05	0.03
Profession	3.01	0.04
Age	2.97	0.08
Education	2.90	0.43
Ethnicity	2.47	0.43
Political beliefs	2.04	-
Identity	**Importance**	**Cohen's *d***
Family	3.74	0.84
Gender	3.05	0.03
Profession	3.01	0.04
Age	2.97	0.08
Education	2.90	0.43
Ethnicity	2.47	0.43
Political beliefs	2.04	-

Table 4: *Results from a four-factor exploratory factor analysis with principal axis factoring and direct oblimin rotation on the CS data*

Identity	Chosen Communities	Sociocultural	Basic demographics	Social class
Place	**.547**	-.075	-.097	-.019
Interests	**.536**	.111	-.089	-.109
Family	.266	-.114	-.009	-.045
Ethnic background	-.019	**-.764**	-.035	-.032
Religion	-.072	**-.598**	.014	-.101
National identity	**.341**	**-.531**	-.036	.103
Origin	.166	**-.416**	-.273	.101
Age	.003	.035	**-.736**	-.104
Gender	.053	-.071	**-.668**	.018
Social Class	.218	-.113	-.259	-.174
Education	-.029	-.061	-.098	**-.666**
Income	.045	-.040	-.234	**-.476**
Profession	.215	-.033	.087	**-.356**

Note: Loadings > .30 are in bold.

Table 5: *Results from a three factor exploratory factor analysis with principal axis factoring and direct oblimin rotation on the USS data*

Identity	Basic demographics	Social class	Sociocultural
Age	**.64**	.08	.03
Gender	**.92**	-.14	.02
Profession	.03	**.68**	-.04
Education	-.01	**.69**	.10
Ethnicity	**.31**	.00	**.49**
Political beliefs	-.04	.03	**.57**
Family	.27	.08	-.01

Note: Loadings > .30 are in bold.

Table 6: *Results from a path analysis predicting the importance of the four identity indices, using CS data*

***N* = 16258**	**Social class-identities**			**Demographic-identities**		
Predictor	***b***	**95% BCa CIs**	**β**	***b***	**95% BC CIs**	**β**
SES	0.106	[0.093;0.117]	.143***	-0.051	[-0.065;-0.038]	-.061***
Females (vs. males)	0.048	[0.028;0.067]	.038***	0.148	[0.124;0.169]	.102***
Married (vs. single)	0.055	[0.036;0.074]	.043***	-0.003	[-0.024;0.021]	-.002
Age	-0.004	[-0.004;-0.003]	-.100***	-0.001	[-0.001;>0.001]	-.018*
Muslim (vs. Christian)	0.008	[-0.023;0.051]	.005	0.044	[0.005;0.085]	.025*
No Religion (vs. Christian)	-0.138	[-0.163;-0.110]	-.077***	-0.096	[-0.129;-0.059]	-.047***
Other Religion (vs. Christian)	0.032	[-0.006;0.074]	.015	-0.017	[-0.065;0.032]	-.007
Asian (vs. White)	0.133	[0.094;0.166]	.091***	0.104	[0.061;0.144]	.062***
Black (vs. White)	0.173	[0.135;0.202]	.090***	0.203	[0.169;0.240]	.093***
Mixed (vs. White)	0.044	[-0.017;0.096]	.012	0.004	[-0.067;0.071]	.001
Other ethnicity (vs. White)	0.140	[0.092;0.193]	.044***	0.068	[0.012;0.128]	.019*

Continued…

	Sociocultural-identities			Community-identities		
Predictor	***b***	**95% BCa CIs**	**β**	***b***	**95% BC CIs**	**β**
SES	-0.059	[-0.071;-0.048]	-.072***	-0.009	[-0.021;0.003]	-.012
Females (vs. males)	0.094	[0.075;0.114]	.067***	0.098	[0.078;0.118]	.074***
Married (vs. single)	0.027	[0.004;0.047]	.019**	3.036	[0.016;0.058]	.027**
Age	0.005	[0.004;0.005]	.122***	0.001	[0.001;0.002]	.037***
Muslim (vs. Christian)	0.018	[0.138;0.211]	.102***	0.043	[0.003;0.085]	.026*
No Religion (vs. Christian)	-0.049	[-0.517;-0.456]	-.247***	-0.050	[-0.078;-0.018]	-.027**
Other Religion (vs. Christian)	-0.020	[-0.061;0.024]	-.009	-0.004	[-0.046;0.043]	-.002
Asian (vs. White)	0.393	[0.356;0.432]	.244***	-0.004	[-0.047;0.036]	-.003
Black (vs. White)	0.500	[0.472;0.532]	.236***	0.044	[0.008;0.078]	.022*
Mixed (vs. White)	0.170	[0.110;0.235]	.042***	-0.039	[-0.102;0.028]	-.010
Other ethnicity (vs. White)	0.333	[0.286;0.391]	.095***	-0.076	[-0.135;-0.019]	-.023*

Note: b = unstandardized coefficients. 95% BCa CIs = Bias corrected and accelerated 95% confidence intervals. *** $p < .001$; * $p < .01$

Table 7: *Results from a path analysis predicting the importance of the three identity indices, using USS data*

***N* = 36258**	**Social class-identities**			**Demographic-identities**			**Sociocultural-identities**		
Predictor	***b***	**95% BCa CIs**	**β**	***b***	**95% BCa CIs**	**β**	***b***	**95% BCa CIs**	**β**
SES	0.204	[0.194;0.214]	.206***	-0.071	[-0.081;-0.060]	-.067***	-0.012	[-0.022;-0.002]	-.012*
Females (vs. males)	0.102	[0.087;0.118]	.063***	0.146	[0.128;0.163]	.085***	-0.052	[-0.071;-0.036]	-.031***
Married (vs. single)	-0.054	[-0.071;-0.034]	-.034***	-0.012	[-0.030;0.007]	-.007	-0.046	[-0.063;-0.027]	-.027***
Age	-0.006	[-0.006;-0.005]	-.129***	0.001	[<.001;0.001]	.019***	0.009	[0.009;0.010]	.196***
Asian (vs. White)	0.370	[0.339;0.397]	.119***	0.470	[0.441;0.498]	.142***	0.693	[0.655;0.725]	.210***
Black (vs. White)	0.352	[0.304;0.391]	.078***	0.403	[0.358;0.441]	.085***	0.730	[0.683;0.776]	.154***
Mixed (vs. White)	0.131	[0.065;0.191]	.021***	0.201	[0.132;0.265]	.030***	0.478	[0.411;0.542]	.072***
Other ethnicity (vs. White)	0.083	;-0.022;0.191]	.008	0.041	[-0.061;0.154]	.004	0.204	[0.097;0.319]	.019***

Note: b = unstandardized coefficients. 95% BCa CIs = Bias corrected and accelerated 95% confidence intervals. *** $p < .001$; * $p < .01$

FIGURES

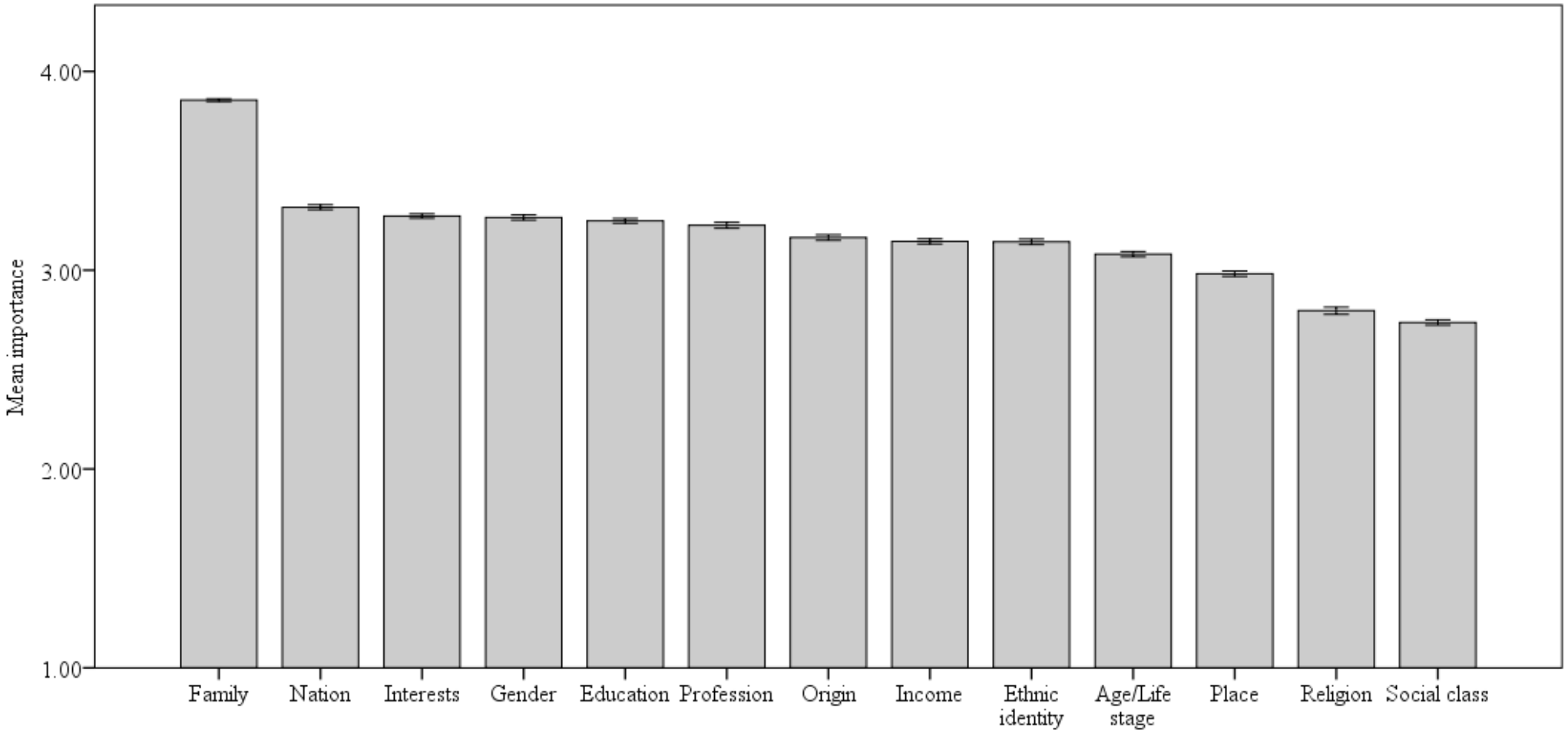

Figure 1. Bar graph showing the mean importance of different identities in the CS data (1 – 4 scale). Error bars represent 95% CIs.

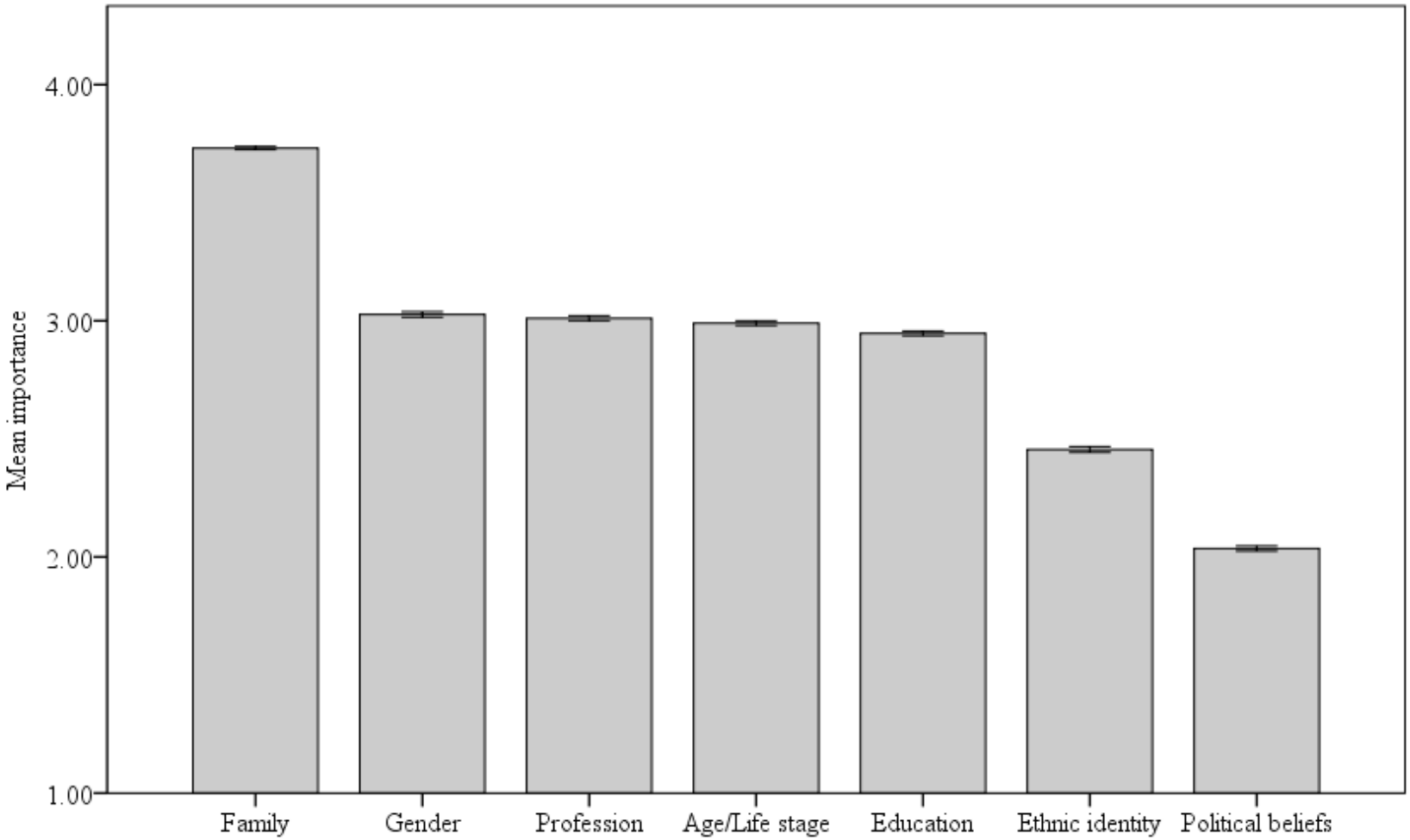

Figure 2. Bar graph showing the mean importance of different identities in the USS data (1 – 4 scale). Error bars represent 95% CIs.

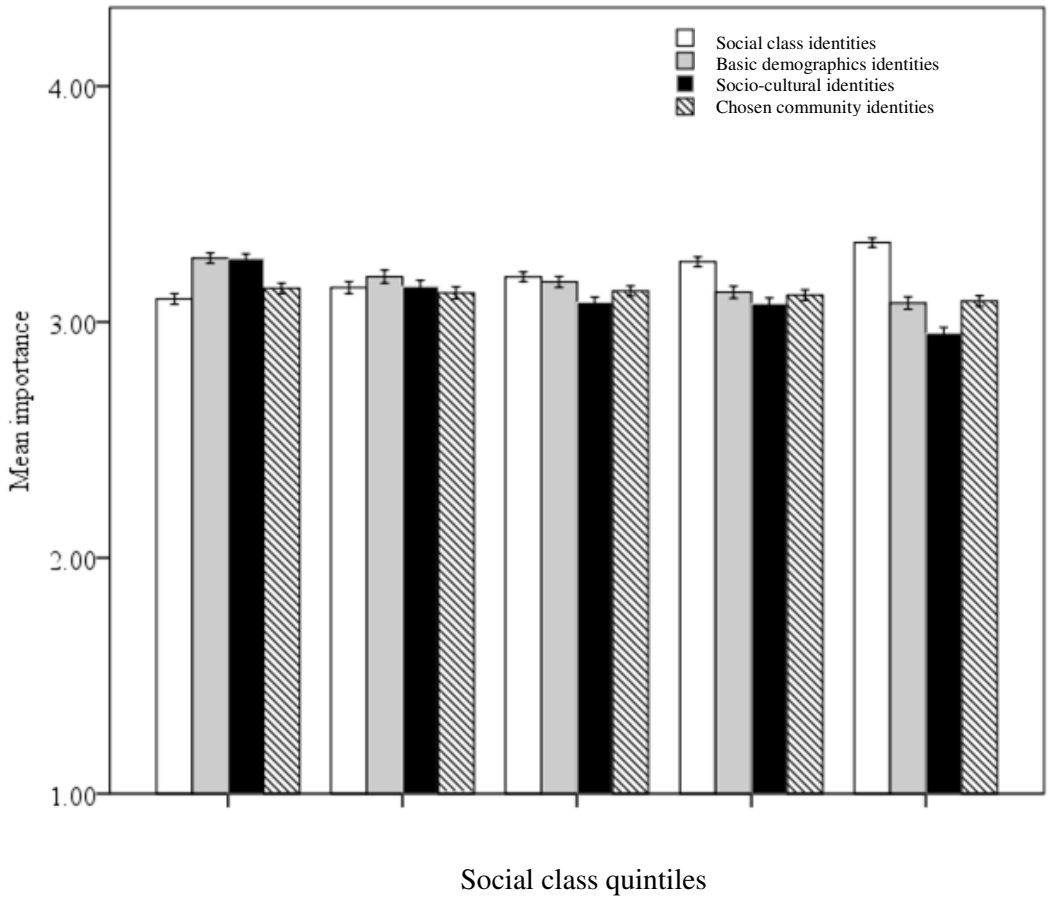

Figure 3. Mean importance of the four identity indices by social class quintiles in the CS.

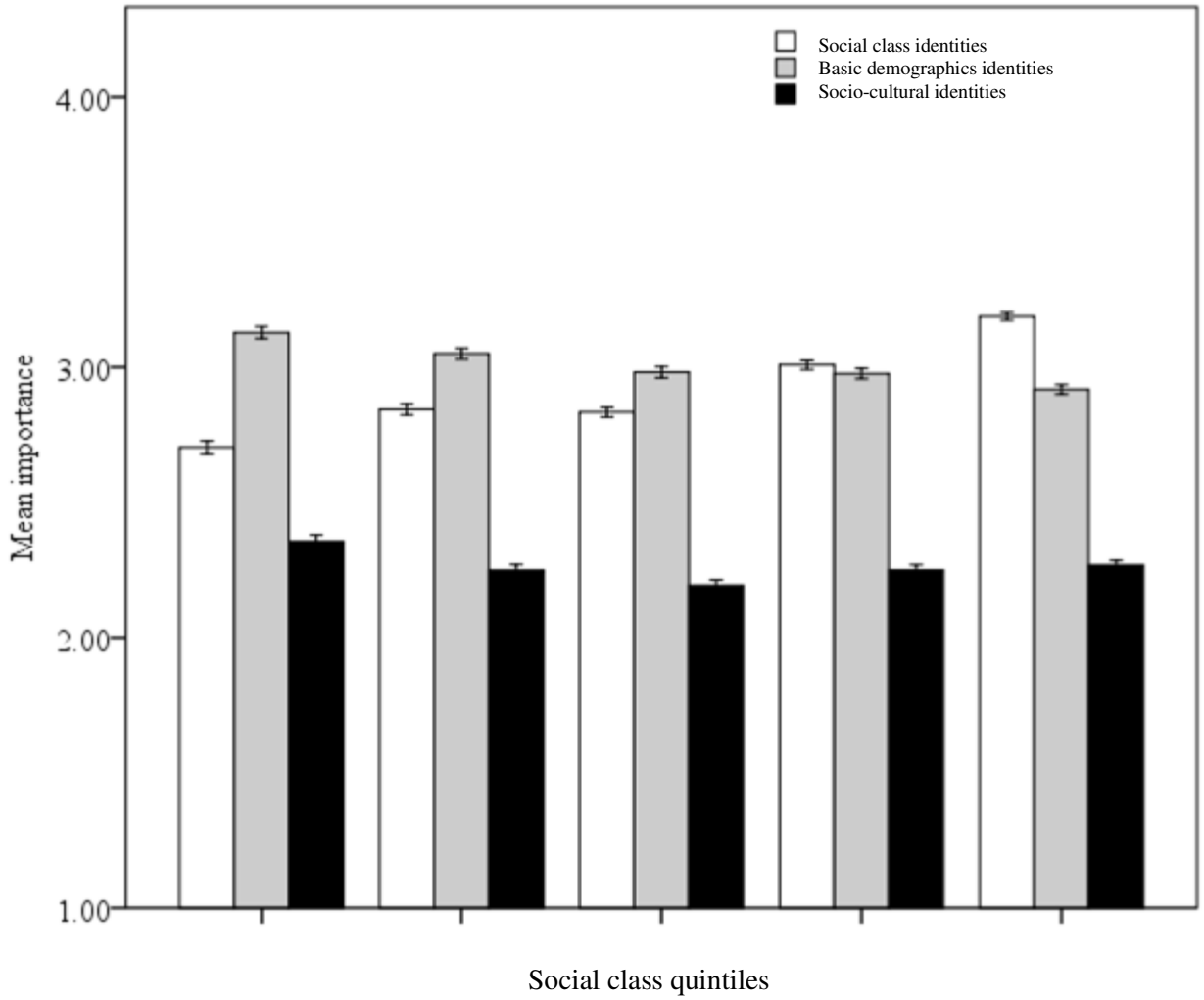

Figure 4. Mean importance of the three identity indices by social class quintiles in the USS.