

The Influence of Class on Class Perceptions in New Zealand

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SOCIOL 701

Quantitative Research Report



To What Degree Does Class Affect Individual Perceptions of Class?

- Ideally, wealth carries no great prestige and no prerogative of leadership, but it may influence ones perception of class in New Zealand (Pitt 1977).
- Bedggood suggests there is a polarisation of the two main classes in New Zealand (1980).
- Often, individuals do not identify as class members and have relatively little class consciousness (Le Roux et al. 2008)
- Bauman and Giddens, suggest the end of class identity and imply the contemporary failings of class analysis.

Data Used

- 2009 International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) Social Inequality Data Set.
- Data gathered from July 29, 2009 to November 30, 2009.
- Self-completed postal questionnaire.
- Sample consisted of a random sample from the 2009 New Zealand electoral roll.
- Sample size 2,250 (44.2% response rate).

Operationalising Concepts – Class (SES) Variable

SES Frequency Table

		Frequ ncy	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulati ve Percent
Valid	Lower Class	12	1.3	1.5	1.5
	Working Class	138	14.8	17.5	19.1
	Lower Middle Class	254	27.2	32.3	51.3
	Middle Class	191	20.4	24.3	75.6
	Upper Middle Class	140	15.0	17.8	93.4
	Upper Class	52	5.6	6.6	100.0
	Total	787	84.2	100.0	
Missing	System	148	15.8		
Total		935	100.0		

Drawing upon the definition provided by Parkinson, socioeconomic position refers to one's placement in a social structure regulated by norms and ranked according to power and prestige. (2003, 401).

Class variable (SES) was created by combining responses to questions relating to level of education, yearly income and occupation.

Source: ISSP 2009 Social Inequality

Individual Perceptions of Class

Individual perceptions of class operationalised using responses to Q 22.

22. Most people see themselves as belonging to a particular class. Please tell us which social class you would say you belong to?

- Lower class ☐
- Working class ☐
- Lower middle class ☐
- Middle class ☐
- Upper middle class ☐
- Upper class ☐

Q20 Which social class would you say you belong to?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Lower class	31	3.3	3.4	3.4
	Working class	147	15.7	15.9	19.3
	Lower middle class	140	15.0	15.2	34.4
	Middle class	476	50.9	→ 51.5	85.9
	Upper middle class	123	13.2	13.3	99.2
	Upper class	7	.7	.8	100.0
	Total	924	98.8	100.0	
Missing	NA	11	1.2		
Total		935	100.0		

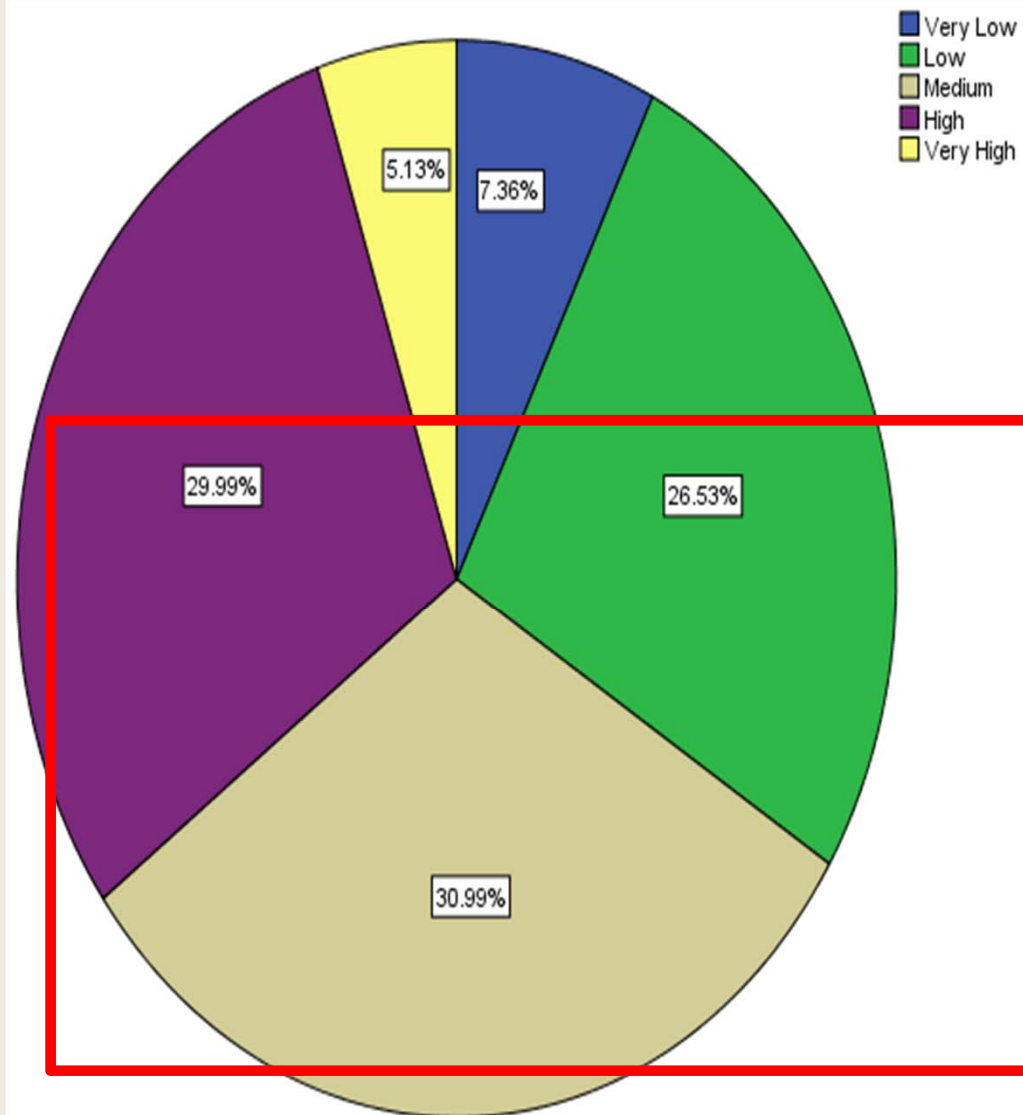
Source: ISSP 2009 Social Inequality

Perceptions of Social Mobility

Social mobility is commonly defined as the individual manoeuvrability of position within the social hierarchy (Macionis 2008, 252).

Operationalised by combining responses to Q. 2. b-d.

Of the 897 responses, roughly 34% perceive Low to Very Low levels, with 35% perceiving High to Very High levels of social mobility.

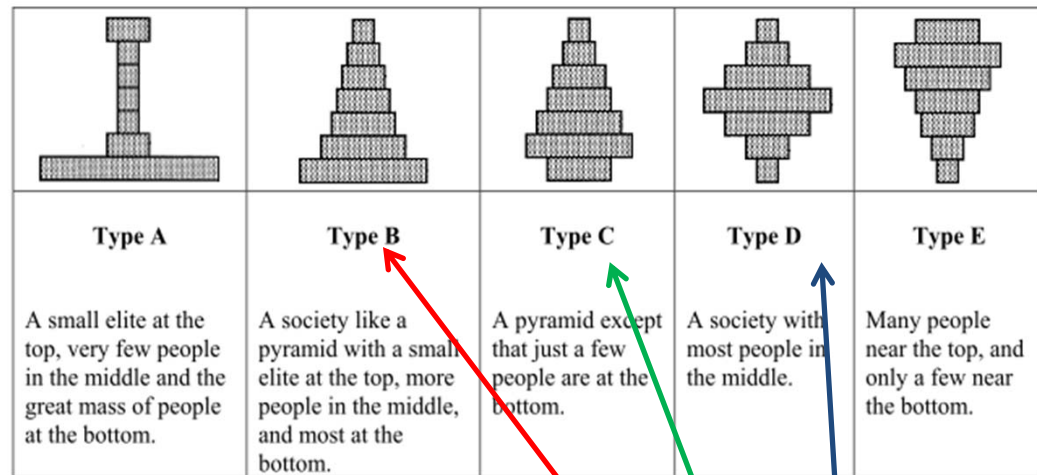


Source: ISSP 2009 Social Inequality

Individual Perceptions of New Zealand Class Structure

Individual views on the class structure of New Zealand society were operationalised using Q. 14a

14. These five diagrams show different types of society. Please read the descriptions and look at the diagrams and decide which you think best describes New Zealand.



14a. First, what type of society is New Zealand today – which diagram comes closest?

Societal Views of New Zealand					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Type A	59	6.3	6.5	6.5
	Type B	300	32.1	33.0	39.5
	Type C	232	24.8	25.5	65.0
	Type D	303	32.4	33.3	98.3
	Type E	15	1.6	1.7	100.0
	Total	909	97.2	100.0	
Missing	Can't choose	13	1.4		
	NA	13	1.4		
	Total	26	2.8		
Total		935	100.0		

Source: ISSP 2009 Social Inequality

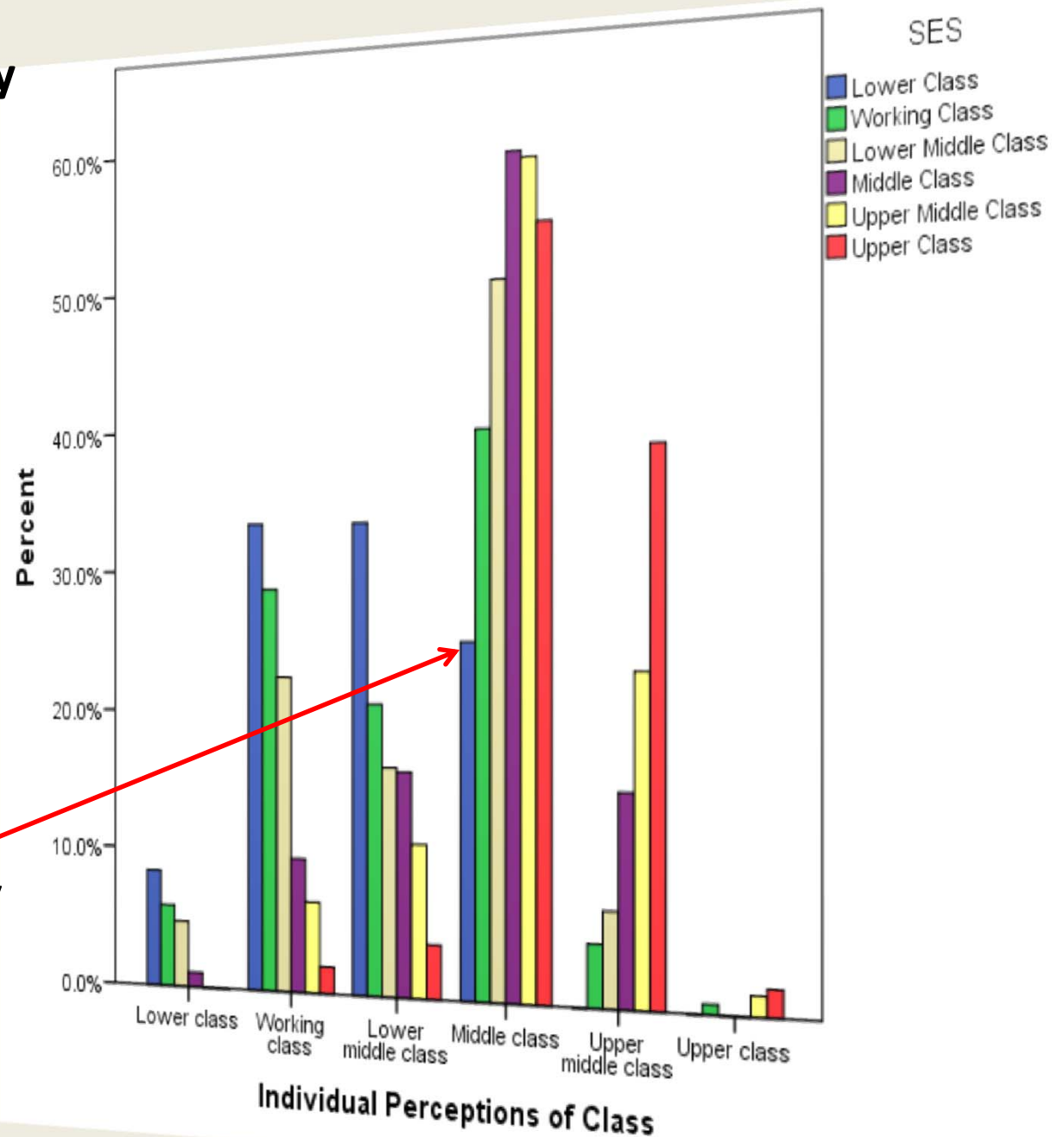
Data Analysis – SES by Individual Perceptions of Class

The majority perceive to be of the middle class.

Those in the lower class categories (lower – working class) tend to have higher perceptions of class, while those in the higher class categories (upper middle – upper class) tend to have lower perceptions of class.

Interestingly, those of the lower class are the only group of which the majority do not perceive themselves to be of the middle class.

Source: ISSP 2009 Social Inequality



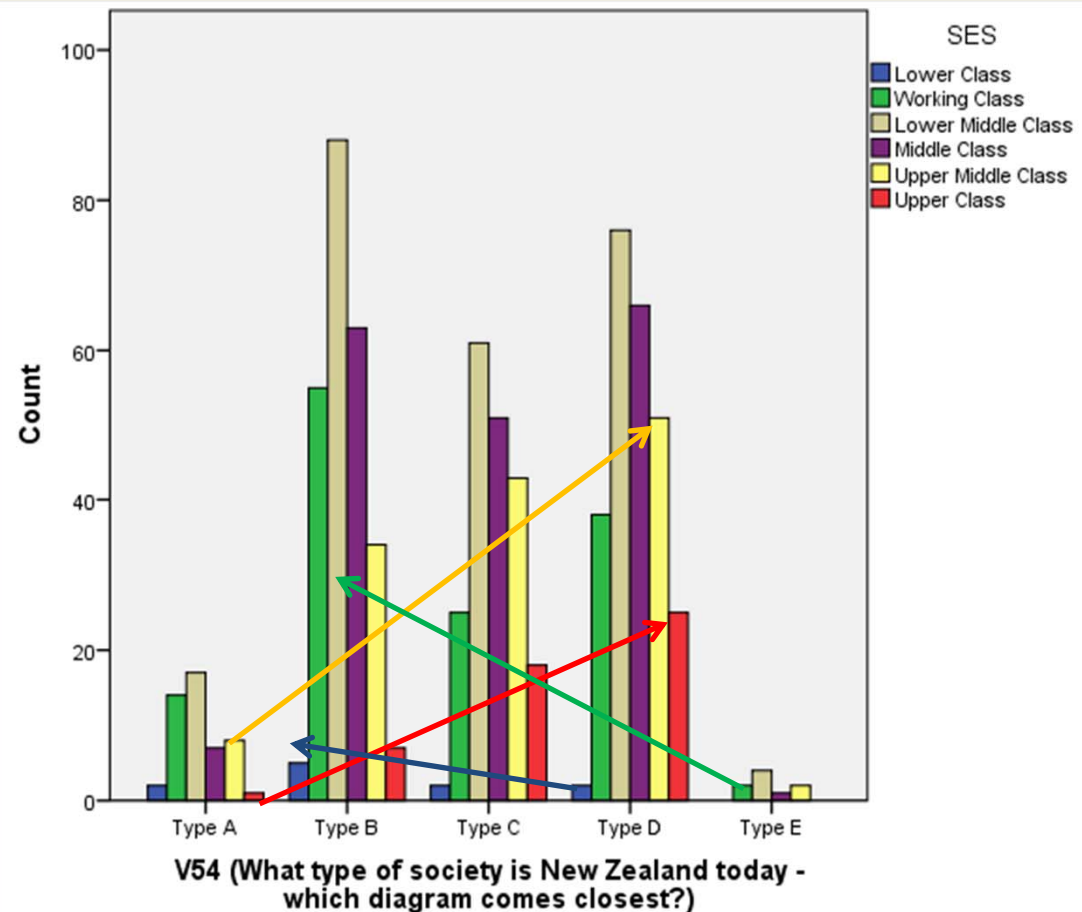
SES by Perceptions of New Zealand Class Structure

The majority of those in the lower and working classes view New Zealand as a Type B society

Whereas, the majority of the upper middle and upper classes view New Zealand as a Type D society.

Moving from Type A – Type D, we see the upper middle and upper class count rising.

Broadly speaking, moving from Type D – Type A, we see the lower and working class count rising.



14. These five diagrams show different types of society. Please read the descriptions and look at the diagrams and decide which you think best describes New Zealand.

Type A	Type B	Type C	Type D	Type E
A small elite at the top, very few people in the middle and the great mass of people at the bottom.	A society like a pyramid with a small elite at the top, more people in the middle, and most at the bottom.	A pyramid except that just a few people are at the bottom.	A society with most people in the middle.	Many people near the top, and only a few near the bottom.

Discussion

- Knowing one's class provides us with a moderate to substantial ability to predicate individual perceptions of class.
- Results may suggest a slightly increased awareness of class by those individuals most 'greatly' affected by class distinction.
- Data suggests opposing views of New Zealand society in relation to individual class.

- Class is important in structuring individual perceptions of class inequality.
- As it relates to the data, broadly speaking, those in the lower and working classes appear to view New Zealand as a class based society, while those of the upper classes do not.
- The 'hidden injuries of class' (Le Roux et al. 2008), may not be so hidden after all.

Sources

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