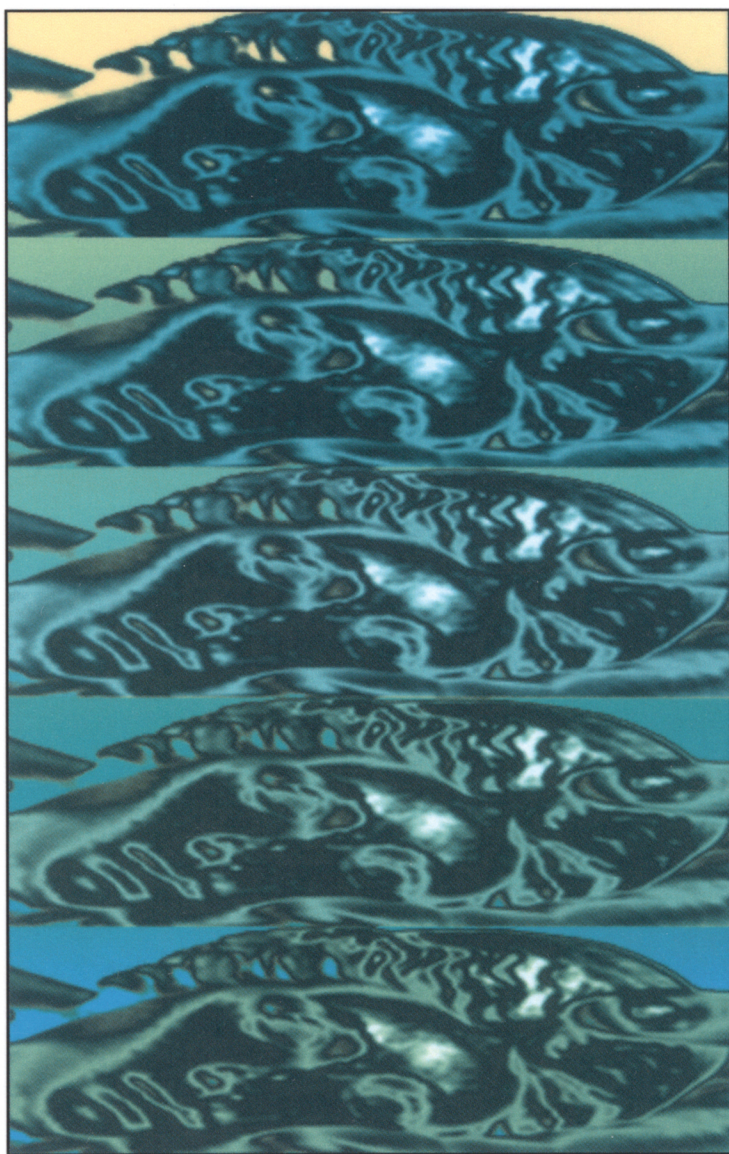


# Formations of Class & Gender

Beverley Skeggs



# FORMATIONS OF CLASS AND GENDER

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# FORMATIONS OF CLASS AND GENDER

Becoming Respectable

Beverley Skeggs



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# Contents

1	Introduction: Processes, Frameworks and Motivations	1
2	Respectable Knowledge: Experience and Interpretation	17
3	Historical Legacies: Respectability and Responsibility	41
4	Developing and Monitoring a Caring Self	56
5	(Dis)Identifications of Class: On Not Being Working Class	74
6	Ambivalent Femininities	98
7	Becoming Respectably Heterosexual	118
8	Refusing Recognition: Feminisms	139
9	Conclusions	160
	Bibliography	170
	Index	184

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## Introduction: Processes, Frameworks and Motivations

I think my clothing says I'm respectable. [Mary, 1992]

All my life I've wanted to say 'look I'm as good as you', well now I think this house says it. It says 'I've made it, I'm respectable and you can't put me down'. [Yvonne, 1992]

Respectability is one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class. It informs how we speak, who we speak to, how we classify others, what we study and how we know who we are (or are not). Respectability is usually the concern of those who are not seen to have it. Respectability would not be of concern here, if the working classes (Black and White) had not consistently been classified as dangerous, polluting, threatening, revolutionary, pathological and without respect.<sup>1</sup> It would not be something to desire, to prove and to achieve, if it had not been seen to be a property of 'others', those who were valued and legitimated. If respectability had not been one of the key mechanisms by which some groups were 'othered' and pathologized it would not be the subject of this study. It is rarely recognized as an issue by those who are positioned with it, who are normalized by it, and who do not have to prove it. Yet for those who feel positioned by and position themselves against the discourse of respectability it informs a great deal of their responses. For the 83 White working-class women of this longitudinal ethnographic study, set in the North West of England, respectability is always an issue.

Feminist (and) cultural theory proliferates with theories of identities and subjective constructions, but few of these theories explore the processes by which 'real' women negotiate and understand them'selves'. This book contextualizes theoretical debates through closely detailed ethnographic research. It is based on research conducted over a total period of 12 years including three years' full-time, in-the-field participant observation. It began when the women enrolled on a 'caring' course at a local college and it follows their trajectories through the labour market, education and the family. In this sense, it is part of what Marcus (1992) defines as modernist ethnography which concentrates on how subjectivities are constructed across a range of different sites, across time, enabling long-term analysis of movements, investments and positionings. It is part of the British Cultural Studies tradition in that theoretical, methodological and political concerns are worked through empirical understandings and that careful attention is paid to the historical legacies which inform contemporary representations. The book draws on a



range of cultural and feminist theorists to engage with the lived experience of how the women inhabit different social positions and cultural representations.

There has been a marked tendency in recent years to move away from talking and listening to those outside of academia. This book shows how theory can be radically transformed if others are let in on the conversations. The women of this study are not just ciphers from which subject positions can be read-off; rather, they are active in producing the meaning of the positions they (refuse to, reluctantly or willingly) inhabit. The methodological debates about the production of knowledge are central to the book which engages in the more general debates within epistemology about reflexivity and methodology whilst also making explicit the processes through which the theories are constituted and reconstituted over time.

Whilst this book draws on the attempts of a specific group of women to negotiate class, gender, hetero/sexuality, femininity, caring and feminism, it does have a more general address. That is to question how feminists, cultural theorists and sociologists have generated frameworks to understand how women live and produce themselves through social and cultural relations. The ramifications of the particular analysis provide a grounded framework which is applicable to other groups (who are always positioned in proximity to respectability).<sup>2</sup> Respectability contains judgements of class, race, gender and sexuality and different groups have differential access to the mechanisms for generating, resisting and displaying respectability.<sup>3</sup> By using respectability as an analytical tool this book aims to reinstate class in feminist (and) cultural theory. This is because class as a concept and working-class women as a group have almost disappeared from the agendas of feminism and cultural theory. Yet, as this book will show, the category 'woman' is always produced through processes which include class and classifying produces very real effects which are lived on a daily basis.

This introduction maps the centrality of respectability to the development of class categorizations. It then makes an argument for reinstating class and establishes a framework for doing so. The final section provides an outline and documents the motivations for the book.

### **Respectable Distinctions**

Respectability was a central mechanism through which the concept class emerged. Finch (1993) shows how the categorization of social groups in the UK and Australia occurred through the interpretation of the behaviour of women of urban slums and the classification of them into respectable and non-respectable. This division, she argues, came to be seen as a reasonable way of relating to, and intervening in, the lives of people defined as working class; and Nead (1988) shows how judgements about respectability were central to nineteenth-century visual representations of femininity and moral judgements about women's appearance. Judgements of respectability were also central to the organization of women's homes, their childcare practices

and the control they exercised over members of their family. These judgments persevere, as Susan notes in response to visits by a Health Visitor:

You know they're weighing you up and they ask you all these indirect questions as if you're too thick to know what they're getting at and you know all the time they're thinking 'she's poor, she's no good, she can't bring her kids up properly' and no matter what you do they've got your number. To them you're never fit, never up to their standards. [Susan, 1992]

All the time you've got to weigh everything up: is it too tarty? will I look like a right slag in it? what will people think? It drives me mad that every time you go to put your clothes on you have to think 'do I look dead common? is it rough? do I look like a dog?' [Anne, 1992]

Respectability has always been a marker and a burden of class, a standard to which to aspire: Engels, in the nineteenth century, described the ideal of respectability as 'a most repulsive thing', 'a false consciousness bred into the bones of the workers' (1953: 522–3). The classification by and of the working classes into rough and respectable has a long history (see Stacey, 1975): many attempts – often through religion – were made to 'rescue' White working-class women from the clutches of non-respectability. To not be respectable is to have little social value or legitimacy.

Respectability was also central to the development of the notion of Englishness. It was a key characteristic of what it meant to belong, to be worthy and to be an individual. As Strathern (1992) notes, respectability was the means by which morality was made public and seen to be an object of knowledge. Respectability embodies moral authority: those who are respectable have it, those who are not do not. But only some groups were considered to be capable of being moral, others were seen to be in need of control. Strathern argues 'the first fact of English kinship is the individuality of persons'; this individuality was only available to the genteel middle classes. They were defined against the lack of individuality of the masses. 'Individuals' were the respectable, the moral, the worthy, the English, the White and the non-working class, who could sit in judgement of others. Respectability became a property of middle-class individuals defined against the masses. This early mapping of class relationships onto what it meant to be a worthy, moral individual provides a legacy and framework for this study and for understanding the desires for respectability today. Whilst class relations have clearly been refigured through different historical periods, certain central features remain. The working classes are still 'massified' and marked as others in academic and popular representations where they appear as pathological: the cynical use of single mothers in the UK to represent a threat to social order to generate support for Conservative party policy on law and order (at the 1995 Party Conference) and the use of 'Welfare Mothers' and 'Crack Babies' in the US shows how easily historical constructs can be recycled. Similarly, a recent magazine fashion spread in the UK edition of *Marie Claire* entitled 'Council Estate Slags' suggests that working-class women are still represented through their 'deviant' sexuality.<sup>4</sup>

The women of this study are aware of their place, of how they are socially

positioned and of the attempts to represent them. This constantly informs their responses. They operate with a dialogic form of recognition: they recognize the recognitions of others. Recognitions do not occur without value judgements and the women are constantly aware of the judgements of real and imaginary others. Recognition of how one is positioned is central to the *processes* of subjective construction. Throughout the book I show how experiences of being positioned and classified (as working class, as heterosexual, as feminine, as caring, as vulgar, as feminist) produce different responses which impact upon subjective construction. These recognitions enable the women to navigate themselves through classificatory systems and measure and evaluate themselves accordingly. One central feature of the research is how the positions they occupy are rarely accommodated with comfort. They live their social locations with unease. The book explores the uneasy sense of standing under signs to which one does and does not belong (Butler, 1992).

The central themes which are used throughout the book are as follows: first, *processes of identification* and differentiation, including recognition, disidentification, dissimulation and subjective construction; second, *issues of location*, positioning and movement through social space and place – here special attention is given to issues of *access*; third, *interrogation and applicability of concepts* and categories used here and in feminist theory more generally, and fourth, the *deployment of different forms of capital*. This chapter first makes an argument for reinstating class into feminist and cultural theory. It then sets out frameworks, used in the rest of the book – on metaphors of capital and processes of subjective production – ending with chapter outlines and a brief discussion of my motivation to study respectability.

### Reinstating Class

Finch (1993) examines how ‘the working class’ as a category came into effect through middle-class conceptualizations. These conceptualizations were produced from anxiety about social order and through attempts by the middle class to consolidate *their* identity and power by distancing themselves from definable ‘others’. The middle class, Finch shows, came to recognize themselves through difference: a difference they produced through the generation and distribution of representations of different ‘others’: as McClintock notes:

The degenerate classes, defined as departures from the normal human type, were as necessary to the self-definition of the middle-class as the idea of degeneration was to the idea of progress, for the distance along the path of progress travelled by some portions of humanity could be measured only by the distance others lagged behind. (1995: 46)

The conceptualizations of the middle classes were enabled by particular Enlightenment technologies, such as social surveys, observation, photography and ethnography, which were part of a project to constitute ‘reason’ through the classification of observable behaviour, what Finch defines as the ‘classing gaze’:

The range of chosen concerns through which middle-class observers made sense of the observed, included references to: living room conditions . . . drinking behaviour . . . language (including both the type of things which were spoken about, and the manner in which they were referred to – literally the types of words used); and children's behaviour . . . These were *moral*, not economic, references. (1993: 10; emphasis added)

By the end of the nineteenth century 'the working class' had become a knowable, measurable and organizable category. They could be recognized and they could learn to recognize themselves through categorization: a categorization which initially had no meaning for them. The importance of the use of moral categories, Finch argues, is that it placed women at the centre of the discursive construction because it was women who were predominantly observed. At the core of all articulations of the working class was the discursive construct of the modern, that is middle-class, family in which the behaviour of women was interpreted in relation to their role as wives and mothers and based on their responsibility, the control of their sexuality, their care, protection and education of children and their capacity for the general surveillance of working-class men. Observation *and* interpretation of the sexual behaviour of working-class women on the basis of their appearance was central to the production of middle-class conceptualizations.

The cult of domesticity was central to the self-defining of the middle classes and to the maintenance of ideas of an imperialist nation. Yet the labour involved in its production was often made invisible by the use of 'downstairs' domestic servants (McClintock, 1995). The self-defining of the middle classes also produced, McClintock (1995) argues, the categorizations of race. These categorizations were interlocked with those of class through the generic definition of 'dangerous classes'. Domestic servants, for instance, were often depicted by the racialized iconography of degradation – of contagion, promiscuity and savagery. As Engels (1844/1958) notes of the working class: 'a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and intellectually to bestiality' (p. 33) who are 'a race wholly apart' (p. 361). Depictions of domestic degeneracy, McClintock shows, were widely used to mediate the contradictions in imperial hierarchy.

It is these historical productions of class into which any representation of class is located: class is a discursive, historically specific construction, a product of middle-class political consolidation, which includes elements of fantasy and projection. The historical generation of classed categorizations provide discursive frameworks which enable, legitimate and map onto material inequalities. Class conceptualizations are tautological in that positioning by categorizations and representation influence access to economic and cultural resources. The discursive constructions are recognized as a form of positioning; which is why attempts to classify the women as working class generated such negative responses (as shown in Chapter 5). They have been positioned by the historical discursive construct of class and this has an effect on how they understand themselves and others.

The long and continual process of representing the working class did not

have its history in the re-presentation of an original, of a real; yet the continual re-presentation of representations, which some theorists would identify as a process of reiteration (where representations continually reference themselves through daily reproduction) does have real effects in the responses that people make to them. Representations, however, as this study shows, are not straightforwardly reproduced but are resisted and transfigured in their daily enactment. Categories of class operate not only as an organizing principle which enable access to and limitations on social movement and interaction but are also reproduced at the intimate level as a 'structure of feeling' (cf. Williams, 1961, 1977) in which doubt, anxiety and fear inform the production of subjectivity. To be working-classed, Kuhn (1995) argues, generates a constant fear of never having 'got it right'.

Without understanding the significance of class positioning many of the women's movements through social space, through education, families, labour markets and in particular, in the production of their subjectivity, could not be understood. Yet class has almost disappeared from feminist analyses, even those claiming a materialist feminist position (see, for instance, Hennessy, 1993).<sup>5</sup> This may be because in the past the majority of feminist debates on class have focused on very detailed Marxist analysis of the family, the labour market and the value of domestic labour (Breugel, 1979; Brenner and Ramas, 1984) or it may be that it has disappeared because class itself is so hard to define. For instance, do we mean class structure, identity, consciousness, action, and so on when we speak of class? Other difficult questions are also raised: how does class relate to the sexual division of labour, and is it a cause or an effect? Have feminists avoided class because it is impossible to measure accurately? (see Crompton, 1993, for a summary of the debates). Or is it that for those who now get to write and represent feminist (and) cultural theory class is not experienced or felt as immediately as gender? It may not be recognized as a problem for those who have the privilege to ignore it.<sup>6</sup> The retreat from class in feminist theory, McRobbie (1982) argues, has had an important function of enabling other spheres of women's lives to be investigated such as the state and the law. But it seems that the baby has been thrown out with the bath water. To abandon class as a theoretical tool does not mean that it does not exist any more; only that some theorists do not value it. It does not mean the women would experience inequality any differently; rather, it would make it more difficult for them to identify and challenge the basis of the inequality which they experience. Class inequality exists beyond its theoretical representation. The movement in feminist theory from a Marxist perspective into more literary informed influences parallels a class movement, whereby feminist theory becomes more 'up-market', drawing on the cultural capital of those who have had access to 'high culture' and higher education: in some cases feminist theory has become a vehicle for displaying 'cleverness' and masking the inequalities that enable 'cleverness' to be produced and displayed.

The retreat from class has occurred across a range of academic sites. Retreatists either ignore class or argue that class is 'an increasingly redundant

issue' (for instance, Holton and Turner, 1989, 1994). This is consolidated by publishers who tell me that 'class doesn't sell'. The retreat, Crompton (1993) defines as the sociological equivalent of the 'new individualism', a movement highly evident in many postmodern theories (Callinicos, 1989; Skeggs, 1991c). Interestingly race is not dismissed as a structural dinosaur. A great deal of postmodernist theorizing dismisses class as a structural concept, a relic from modernism which has no applicability to the supposed ability to travel through differences unencumbered by structure or inequality. The concept of difference has, in many places, come to stand in for inequality (see Maynard, 1994). Harvey (1993) notes the irony of this at a time when business interests are operating as classes and using the state as a class instrument (Edsall, 1984).<sup>7</sup> Others make retreats from class analysis by using empirical evidence to suggest that the significance of class has declined. They usually use social mobility, educational opportunity and electoral behaviour studies to 'demonstrate' the decline of class. Goldthorpe and Marshall (1992), however, argue that exactly the same empirical data can be used to show class is still significant as a major means of social differentiation, and Warde (1994) notes that the 'decline of class' thesis is usually a matter of speculation with little substantive evidence.

The search for a more appropriate label, however, draws attention away from exploitation. Also, when a retreat is mounted we need to ask whose experiences are being silenced, whose lives are being ignored and whose lives are considered worthy of study.<sup>8</sup> We also need to think about the relationship between responsibility and knowledge: to ignore or make class invisible is to abdicate responsibility (through privilege) from the effects it produces. To think that class does not matter is only a prerogative of those unaffected by the deprivations and exclusions it produces. Making class invisible represents a historical stage in which the identity of the middle classes is assured. There was a time when the concept was considered necessary by the middle classes to maintain and consolidate differences in power: its recent invisibility suggests that these differences are now institutionalized, legitimated and well established. So rather than abandon the concept of class as a reactionary configuration I want to re-nuance it to show how it is a major feature of subjectivity, a historical specificity and part of a struggle over access to resources and ways of being. Class informs not only the production of these women's subjectivity but also how it is central to us all, even if we do not feel impeded by it or choose not to recognize it, or to avoid it through disidentifications and dissimulations.

The next section on metaphors of capital provides the general theoretical framework that informs each chapter of the book. This framework is chosen because it provides the greatest explanatory power to understand the intersections of class and gender in subjective production. It enables an analysis which can understand contradiction and investment across space and time. The framework is established here so that each chapter can work through the nuances of it in practice in relation to each different formation of caring, femininity, class, feminism and sexuality. Each chapter modifies the framework

though the specificity of its analysis but ultimately it is the archaeological foundation on which the book is built.

### Framework: Metaphors of Capital

Bourdieu (1979, 1986, 1987, 1989) suggests a model of class which is based on 'capital' movements through social space. The structure of this space is given by the distribution of the various forms of 'capital', by the distribution of their properties, properties which are capable of conferring strength, power and consequently profit on their holder. This also enables an analysis of the micropolitics of power. From this model we can see how class formation operates between abstract structures and concrete specifics of everyday life, noting that because of constant change, class formation is necessarily partial (Sayer and Walker, 1992). Class, for Bourdieu, is neither an essence or an indeterminate set of fluctuating signifiers, but an arbitrarily imposed definition with real social effects (Moi, 1991). He identifies four different types of capital: economic, cultural, social, symbolic:

- 1 Economic capital: this includes income, wealth, financial inheritances and monetary assets.<sup>9</sup>
- 2 Cultural capital: this can exist in three forms – in an embodied state, that is in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods; and in the institutionalized state, resulting in such things as educational qualifications. The discourses of femininity and masculinity become embodied and can be used as cultural resources. This is not to say that gendered relations are purely cultural. They are not. Cultural capital only exists in relation to the network of other forms of capital. Gender carries different amounts of symbolic capital in different contexts (Moi, 1991).<sup>10</sup>
- 3 Social capital: resources based on connections and group membership. This is capital generated through relationships.<sup>11</sup>
- 4 Symbolic capital: this is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate. Legitimation is the key mechanism in the conversion to power. Cultural capital has to be legitimated before it can have symbolic power. Capital has to be regarded as legitimate before it can be capitalized upon. All capitals are context specific. Thus people are distributed in the overall social space according to: the global *volume* of capital they possess; the *composition* of their capital, the relative weight in their overall capital of the various forms of capital and evolution in time of the volume and composition according to their *trajectory* in social space.

The social space we occupy has been historically generated. If the transmission of capital over time, hence in families over generations, is introduced we can see how when we are born, we enter an inherited social space from

which comes access to and acquisition of differential amounts of capital assets. From being born into gender, class and race relations we occupy the associated social positions such as 'woman', 'Black', 'working class' (Moi, 1991). We also inherit ways of understanding; we inherit the meanings associated with social positions and positions in knowledge. Each kind of capital can only exist in the interrelationships of social positions; they bring with them access to or limitation on which capitals are available to certain positions. They become gendered through being lived, through circulation, just as they become classed, raced and sexed: they become simultaneously processed. The social relations of capitals into which we are born and move have been constructed historically through struggles over assets and space. Gender, class and race are not capitals as such, rather they provide the relations in which capitals come to be organized and valued. Masculinity and Whiteness, for instance, are valued (and normalized) forms of cultural capital.<sup>12</sup> Our social locations influence our movement and relations to other social positions and hence our ability to capitalize further on the assets we already have. For instance, if born into a White working-class family with only small amounts of historically designated legitimate cultural capital (say, for example, the cultural capital of the 'lads' studied by Willis (1977) which was macho physical hardness, or the working-class femininity of the women of this study) the ability to trade with this asset will be circumscribed by the division of labour and the values already ascribed to particular assets generated through historical symbolic struggle. The 'lads' find their physicality to have little worth in a predominantly service economy. Yet despite their inability to trade this masculinity in the division of labour they are able to use it to gain power (but not capital) in relationships with women. In the same way, the women (as is shown in Chapter 4) had by the age of 16 only limited capital to trade – their feminine cultural capital – and this was only convertible on a diminishing labour market or as unpaid labour in voluntary caring or in the family. When they traded their femininity and appearance on the marriage market (see Chapters 6 and 7) they were able to negotiate more power but only in interpersonal terms rather than gaining access to wider institutional power. The trading of femininity, however, also involves them as the object of the exchange. The women had only limited resources to trade; their ability to increase their capital assets, to convert them to gain material reward, was severely limited. 'Family' factors which influence all forms of capital also imposed limitations as a substantial proportion of the young women (28 per cent) have had to contend with abusive fathers, children's homes, foster parents, separated or divorced parents, which severely disrupted their ability to accrue capital across various sites. This means that they never enter a level playing field.

Bourdieu's economistic metaphors are useful for understanding how access, resources and legitimation contribute to class formation. For instance, we can understand why those with a small volume of cultural capital will have difficulties increasing its composition and will subsequently have a circumscribed trajectory. To avoid relativizing the different forms of capital we need to



understand the mechanisms by which the different forms of capital are enabled or curtailed. We need to know how the structures historically generated from previous movements of capital such as the labour market and the education system institutionalize (that is provide spaces for the capitalization of the different forms of capital). Embodied capital, such as physical appearance, can be capitalized upon in labour and marriage markets (as Chapter 6 shows). Class positions are not just relative forms in social space, they are institutionalized positions: the cultural capital of the middle classes can offer substantial rewards in the labour market. Chapter 3 charts the symbolic and historical struggles which institutionalized caring as a form of working-class femininity with limited access to economic capital and Chapter 4 sets out how these symbolic struggles become institutionalized through the provision of limited subject positions to inhabit.

But, we need to remember that the different forms of capital Bourdieu identifies are essentially metaphors, they are not descriptors of empirical positions.<sup>13</sup> They are useful, Moi (1991) argues, because they enable us to identify the interests and benefits of particular groups. However, Bourdieu's (1986) *Distinction*, an analysis which develops these metaphors, does ultimately code behaviour in a cold and mechanical classificatory manner which does not bring out the pleasures and pain associated with gender, class and sexuality. This book does not hide these affective aspects of inequality.

It is the symbolic struggles that enable inequalities in capital to be reproduced. Analysing access and legitimation of cultural formations enables us to see how cultural capital is or is not converted into symbolic capital and hence how inequalities are generated and systematic disempowerment engendered. Symbolic capital is powerful capital: it brings power with it. If one's cultural capital is delegitimated then it cannot be traded as an asset; it cannot be capitalized upon (although it may retain significance and meaning to the individual) and its power is limited. Femininity, for instance, can be seen as a form of cultural capital. It is the discursive position available through gender relations that women are encouraged to inhabit and use. Its use will be informed by the network of social positions of class, gender, sexuality, region, age and race which ensure that it will be taken up (and resisted) in different ways. Whereas it is possible to trade masculinity more readily and for greater reward in the labour market (men still hold the majority of jobs in the primary labour market, for instance), the ability to capitalize on femininity is restricted. It provides only restricted access to potential forms of power.

Femininity can be used socially in tactical rather than strategic ways. De Certeau (1988) distinguishes between strategies and tactics: strategies, he argues, have institutional positioning and are able to conceal their connections with power; tactics have no institutional location and cannot capitalize on the advantages of such positioning. Rather, tactics constantly manipulate events to turn them into opportunities; tactical options have more to do with constraints than possibilities. They are determined by the absence of power just as strategy is organized by the postulation of power.<sup>14</sup> Femininity brings with it little social, political and economic worth. It is not a strong asset to

trade and capitalize upon. As McCall (1992) notes, rarely is femininity exclusively profitable for women as implied in Bourdieu's definitions. This argument is developed in Chapter 6.

Most representations of working-class people contribute to devaluing and delegitimizing their already meagre capitals, putting further blocks on tradability, denying any conversion into symbolic capital. When conversion is blocked positions of inequality are maintained. The allocative function of education plays a role in delegitimizing and limiting the value of the cultural capital of working-class groups. The blocking of conversion also occurs at the cultural and discursive level whereby the symbolic capital of one group enables it to use its power to culturally and economically exploit another. The classic case is the symbolic representations of Black women and men as atavistic, animalistic and inhuman in order to legitimate the practices of slavery and colonial exploitation (Fryer, 1984). Likewise, the representational denigration of White working-class women blocks their capacity to convert their cultural capital into symbolic capital to gain other capitals and ensure material security.

The space for contestation over cultural and symbolic forms of capital occurs at local as well as national and global levels. The local is the site where de-legitimacy is resisted. Yet the ability to counteract the de-legitimation of their own cultural capital at a local level does not mean that already devalued capital can be capitalized upon. Rather it suggests momentary refusals of powerlessness. To challenge powerlessness does not mean that one automatically shifts into positions of power. It means, straightforwardly, that one is refusing to be seen as powerless or be positioned without power.

To stretch economic metaphors even further it may be useful to think of the value of the arenas in which different forms of capital are traded. The structure of the field of power, argues Waquant (1993), depends at every moment on struggles over the respective weight of different forms of capital within the structure. *Not* being middle class is certainly valued in many working-class social groups. In fact careful monitoring for pretensions often takes place, evidenced through the long-standing clichés, such as 'too big for your boots', 'full of airs and graces' or 'stepping out of line'. Clichés as Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) note have the useful purpose of reminding us who we are. The women of the study 'know their place'. Yet, the display of working-classness, such as strong regional accent or critique of pretensions, may be devalued in different arenas (markets) such as education or the media in which the exchange rate is rarely established by the working class. Different arenas have different powers.<sup>15</sup> The media as an institutional site for symbolic capital is able to legitimate the symbolic power of the middle classes, whereas local working-class resistance has no powerful institutional site to distribute its claims to legitimacy – its 'right to be'. The media as an institution can produce symbolic violence against the working classes. It is these different market values (themselves historically developed from the division of labour, from resistance to it, from struggles against exploitation and delegitimacy) that may give local cultural value to certain dispositions but which have little

trading value on the markets that matter for economic survival. The women constantly enter implicit trading arenas where their sexuality, femininity and respectability are judged in terms of value in which the rate is established by others.

Just as metaphors of capital provide a framework for understanding power and exchange in the reproduction of inequality, metaphors of space have a similar explanatory value for understanding movement through social space and restrictions on it. Metaphors of spaces and places such as location and positioning enable distribution and allocation of resources and peoples to be framed.<sup>16</sup> There is also a real physical aspect to the women's movement through space (social mobility), especially in the areas to which they are denied entry.

Access to knowledge, capitals and movement is a key feature of the study. Whereas postmodernist theories imply that there can be a voluntary free fall through the social positions that are available to people to inhabit, this study demonstrates how restriction on access is central to subjective constructions. Economic positions, institutional positions, subject positions and discursive positions are not equally accessible. Being an 'individual', for instance, is rarely available as a discursive means for knowing themselves as working-class women. This links into Foucault's (1988) later work where he acknowledges that subjectivity can only be constructed from positions within social relations and structures.

I now set out how I use certain concepts throughout the book. Subjectivity is used to mean the conditions of being subjected to frameworks of regulation, knowledge and discourse and constructing subjectivity in the process. This is developed from Henriques et al. (1984) who use the French *assujettir* to mean both to produce subjectivity and to make subject. These processes are investigated by exploring the women's experiences of what it is *to be* through categorization, such as 'woman', 'feminine', 'heterosexual'. And I use subject positions to investigate the specificities of how women become particular subjects, especially respectable subjects. Subject positions are the effects of discourse *and* (organizational) structures.<sup>17</sup> They are part of wider discourses (for instance, caring can apply to a wide range of activities and occupations). How particular discourses inform subject positions depends on how they are organized through institutional structures (such as education and the media). Discursive positions are less specific than subject positions. Respectability is a discursive position which informs the take-up and content of subject positions. Institutional organization influences the form discourses are able to take and which discourses are available for distribution. The particular shape subject positions take depends not only upon their position within wider discourses and institutions but also on how they are taken up. Some subject positions may not produce subjectivity if they are not occupied or invested in. Subject positions are also different from social positions. Social positions are based on structural organization such as class, race and gender which circumscribe and access movement into certain subject positions. These structurally organized social positions enable and limit our access to cultural,

economic, social and symbolic capital and thus the ability to recognize ourselves as the subject positions we occupy. (Dis)identifications from/with and (dis)simulation of these social and subject positions are the means by which identities come to appear as coherent.

## Outline

Chapter 2 sets out the processes involved in doing the research and in producing this book. It engages in wider debates in feminist theory, methodology and epistemology about the meaning of experience, the role of interpretation, the responsibility and accountability involved in knowledge production. It questions the authority of the researcher and examines the power relations laid bare in the production of the research. It explores how the social positioning and subjectivity of the researcher impact upon and necessarily inform the production of situated knowledge. Chapter 3 provides a historical framework which also contributes to the underpinning of the book. It maps out how contemporary legacies, discursive frameworks and subject positions were produced. Showing how working-class women were always seen to be both a problem and a solution to national crisis in social order, it charts how a form of education, namely 'caring courses', was developed. These courses were produced to incite working-class women to do and take pleasure in domestic duty, enabling the regulation of themselves, the working-class family *and* also provide an available pool of cheap labour. Respectability was closely tied to the domestic ideal – a standard imposed from a very different social positioning – which was promoted as a way of displaying difference from women who were positioned as pathological, polluting and poisonous. By charting the development of the caring courses in relation to wider discourses of respectability this chapter links into the next, Chapter 4, which explores how the women come to develop and monitor their own caring selves. It focuses on the technological practices encouraged on the 'caring courses' by exploring the caring performances that are made, some of which implicate the women in the construction of themselves as 'caring women'. It shows how working-class women do subjectivity differently to that often assumed in feminist and cultural theory.

The next chapter, Chapter 5, shifts focus into a more general analysis of how the women live class on a daily basis. It looks at how class is absolutely central to the women's trajectories through subject positions. Their subjectivities come to be produced through processes of disidentification and dissimulation, showing how the dialogic judgemental other is central to their productions and how class operates at an intimate and emotional level. It also maps out how class is reproduced through constraints on capital exchange and suggests it may be more useful to think of social class as being about access and exclusion, that is, what people do not have rather than what they have. Whilst the women did not want to be marked as working-class they were more ambivalent about femininity, as Chapter 6 shows which maps out how respectability is constructed against sexuality, exploring how the women make

investments into femininity whilst not recognizing themselves as feminine. The use to which femininity as appearance is put to make performances, masquerade and mimic others is analysed.

Recognition becomes even more central to processes of identification when heterosexuality is investigated in Chapter 7. Through historical development the term lesbian has been associated with sexualized Black and White working-class women and sexuality is always mediated through respectability. By exploring another attempt by the women to generate distance from being classified as working class, this chapter explores how they live the category heterosexuality through institutionalization and material practice, yet refuse to recognize themselves as heterosexual. This chapter questions the value of the concept of heterosexuality. The final chapter explores the classed addresses of feminism, analysing the women's knowledge of feminism and the feminism that was available for interpretation at the time of the research. It looks at how investments in respectability and femininity block investments in feminism. It suggests ways feminist theorists may generate dialogue with working-class women (and in so doing produce more adequate theory).

### **Motivations and Parallels**

The motivation behind this research was the development of the kind of theory whose function is, Lyotard (1984) argues, to contest, to overturn a reality, social relations, the relations of human beings to things and to others which are glaringly unbearable. It began as a naive motivation to instigate social change more generally. I now realize this may be more difficult to achieve, although it still remains as an ideal. I want the book to establish a challenge to the complacency of theories which make working-class women invisible or those which pathologize through ignorance and assumption and to challenge the ease by which lazy politicians can wheel out 'pathological working-class women' to gain credibility for reactionary political campaigning.

The motivation is also partly autobiographical and produced from my experiences of marginalization:

I read a woman's book, meet such a woman at a party (a woman now, like me) and think quite deliberately as we talk: we are divided: a hundred years ago I'd have been cleaning your shoes. I know this and you don't. (Steedman, 1986: 2)

My mother's sister was a domestic servant when she was young. It was just over sixty years ago. My mother avoided the same fate because she was younger. This book has been very painful to write because I was/am so close to the subject matter. I write this as my mother unpacks the crystal glasses she has bought me to mark my respectability. I have never achieved the respectability that my parents spent their lives desiring and struggling for (I am not married with children, supported and protected by an economically secure male, sexually contained, and my house is rarely immaculately hygienic – although to others my independence and my job may appear as