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Masters Thesis in Sociology: Track Gender, Sexuality and Society

***“She represents all that is wretched about Britain”*: Folk Devils and Moral Panic in Contemporary Britain**

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Chapter 1

What is ‘Broken Britain’? And who are ‘chav’ women?

“This girl is everything that is wrong today. Scrounger, waster, scum”

This study stems from a desire to understand statements like the one above, in which the sentiment that something is ‘wrong’ in Britain has become attached to a specific ‘type’ of woman. The politicians, media, and inhabitants of the UK have been using the term ‘Broken Britain’ to communicate a sense of crisis, loss, and deterioration since 2008. The starting point for this thesis was the observation that a certain ‘type’ of women -working class women- seemed to have become symbolic of ‘Broken Britain, that they have become crucial within this national bout of pessimism. By framing ‘Broken Britain’ within Stanley Cohen’s conceptualisation of moral panics the idea arose that working class women are this panic’s folk devils. This study sets out to develop this idea, and to deconstruct the process through which working class women have come to represent all that is wrong today in Britain.

Chapter Outline

This first chapter leads the reader through the unfamiliar context of ‘Broken Britain’ and the topic ‘chav’ women. As is explained, ‘chav’ is a contemporary and abusive term for the working class, and working class women are framed within the paradigm of ‘chavs’ within this project. This chapter then goes on to explain the relevance of the topic, the conceptual underpinnings of the study, the research questions and sub-questions, and finally the research design. The fundamental concepts are *discourse* and *discursive practises*, and it is within the outlined conceptual framework that the topic of chavs should be understood. Accordingly, the methodology is discourse analysis, the research design of which is set out in detail towards the end of the chapter.

Discourse of 'Broken Britain'

'Broken Britain' and the 'Broken Society' were the Conservative Party's leitmotifs whilst in opposition and throughout their successful 2010 election campaign. The slogan was adopted by *The Sun* -Britain's most widely read tabloid newspaper- and then spread through the mass media to the point that it became a commonly heard saying. At the most basic level, the Conservative's message was that Britain is 'broken' and in need of repair (Hayton; 2012; 136). With this doom-laden rhetoric the Conservatives heralded the idea that the very fabric of British society has somehow been eroded, and this language of a 'Broken Society' leaked beyond the political vernacular into the popular imaginary via the mass media (Cameron; 2008).

The reader may wonder what *is* 'Broken Britain', what does it *mean*? This is difficult to summarise at this point as the idea of 'Broken Britain', and what it supposedly means or refers to, is characteristically ambiguous. It is set out as part of the findings in chapter three, yet at this point it is necessary to explain that the language of 'Broken Britain' was called upon to explain a very diverse range of changes or happenings across the country, from petty trends like fashion choices, tattoos, or popular television programs, to much graver incidents such as infanticide, violent attacks, and the riots of 2011. Any occurrences veering from ridiculous, depressing, to disturbing could be framed with the 'Broken Britain' paradigm.

Crucial within this study, is that the central explanatory factor for Britain's apparent dissipation within this political argument was family breakdown, and the increase in single-parent households. This emphasis on the family -and the problematisation of single parents- inevitably placed a disproportionate focus on women in their role as mothers within the climate of 'Broken Britain' (Mooney & Hancock; 2010; 17).

Furthermore, whilst the sustained hyperbole of 'Broken Britain' has been a consistent presence in the British political sphere since 2009 it has been punctuated by what I term *flares*, which are news stories and incidents in which anxieties and the use of 'Broken Britain' rhetoric reach a crescendo. The gendered nature of the 'Broken Britain' phenomenon becomes most observable within these momentary *flares*- in which the finger of blame is pointed impassionedly and bitterly at a certain 'type' of women, working-class women, who have been identified -for reasons clear or unclear- as being symbolic of what has gone 'wrong' in Britain.

Four flare case studies were analysed as part of this project, and the details of each are discussed at length in chapter four. At this point, however, it is sufficient to explain

that in each of these cases -and others like them- the women implicated came to symbolise a deeply perturbing threat to the nation that was distinctly *feminised*. Within the rhetoric of 'Broken Britain' -with its imagery of ruin, decay, and doom- it can be proposed that a certain 'type' of woman has become the face of 'something' that has gone very wrong in the British social body. Thus the context of this study is 'Broken Britain', but specifically the ways in which the phenomenon or era of 'Broken Britain' is classed and gendered. There has been a multitude of voices vocalising similar sentiments that something -that is hard to put one's finger on yet that is fundamental to the nation- has been 'broken'. The focus on family, single parents, and the nature of the flare events indicate that a certain 'type' of woman has become the face of 'Broken Britain': I argue that the figuration of these 'types' is class-based, and can best be framed within the discourse of 'chavs'.

The Discourse of the 'Chav'

In the 1990s and early years of the new millennium, a plethora of derogatory terms emerged in the UK, varying from region to region- such as ned, scallie, townie, schemie- all denoting a caricature of the undesirable poor (Hayward & Yar; 2006; 15). Yet one word triumphed as the national catchall epithet for identifying and castigating this social status group: 'chav'. 'Chav' entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2004 on account of its omnipresence across popular culture and discourse. Whilst the exact origins of the word are contested, the most common explanation is that it originates from the Roma word for child: 'chavi' or 'chavo'- another prominent explanation is that it stands for *Council House And Violent* (Jones; 2012; 8). A 'chav' is essentially a caricature with all the pejorative connotations of contemporary poverty attached to it. What is crucial to note is that 'chav' is a classification imposed from outside, practically nobody self-identifies as a 'chav'. Also essential to stress for non-British readers is how commonplace the word is. It is heard across popular media on television programmes, in magazines, in the press, as well as in everyday conversation. Whilst in recent years the word has increasingly been omitted from broadsheet newspapers and government rhetoric on account of its classist nature, 'chav' still carries none of the weight or stigma attached to racist or homophobic insults, it is -and remains in most settings- completely *sayable*.

The degree of uniformity in what 'chavs' are perceived to *look* like, and how they are perceived to *behave* is remarkable. They are represented as generally devoid of

any taste- perpetually clad in tracksuits and vulgar jewellery (Adams & Raisborough; 2011; 83). Their bodies are generally represented as obese, if not as runtishly skinny (Skeggs; 2012; 697). And this unacceptable appearance is deemed to mirror their behaviour; they are lazy, inarticulate, ignorant, violent, irrational, prone to drunkenness and drug abuse (Brewis; 2010; 258; Hollingworth; 2009; 474). At the most basic level the word 'chav' encompasses any negative features associated with the poor, it covers so many areas as to be synonymous with the Orwellian 'prole' (Jones; 2012; 8; Orwell; 1949).

But what is of specific interest here is the gender-specificity of the stereotype of the 'chav'. 'Chav' girls and women share all the general attributes of their label with men -violence, stupidity, irresponsibility, anti-social behaviour- yet they are presented as particularly troubling on the basis of their sexuality and morality.

Great emphasis is placed on the promiscuity and abnormal sexual practises of 'chav' women, together with the depiction of them as being over-fertile and 'breeding like animals' (Adams & Raisborough; 2008; 98; Jones; 2012; 114; Lawler; 2005; 433). The widespread notion that they are immoral often relies on the fetishised 'chav' mum figure- with single mothers being perhaps the most reviled of 'chav' icons (Tyler; 2008; 26). 'Chav' women are represented as bad mothers who neglect and abuse their offspring, raise them in environments of familial disorder and dysfunction, and fail to socialise and instil them with morals (Skeggs; 2005; 965).

More generally -in addition to the specific sexual and moral characteristics of 'chav' woman- everything about them is held to be symbolic of something 'bad'- their bodies, clothes, and homes are all presented as indicators of a deeper pathology. In Tyler's words the 'chav' woman -in essence- adds up to an "...immoral, filthy, ignorant, vulgar, tasteless, working-class whore" (Tyler; 2008; 26).

I propose that the discourses of 'Broken Britain' and 'chavs' are mutually reinforcing and reliant upon one another. They have created a social reality that is experienced as real, in which Britain is being eroded to the extent that it is in a state of crisis. These twin discourses have produced the symbolic and tropological 'chav' woman and vested her with significance. Certain women have become recognisable 'types' in the context of these discourses, and have become both a morbid fascination and a go-to for explaining a plethora of social problems. They are portrayed as indicative of something deeply troubling, marked as having chosen to live beyond the line of what

is nationally constituted as morally appropriate, and are thus understood as dangerous to the nation in the context of 'Broken Britain' (Skeggs; 2012; 227).

Relevance of the Topic and Study

The topic of 'chav' women and context of 'Broken Britain' taken together holds both significant social and theoretical relevance. The social relevance is that it identifies, deconstructs, and lays bare the continuing classist and sexist notions that remain prevalent in contemporary Britain. This is worthwhile because the UK -probably along with many other western democracies- functions on an assumed and, I argue, unfounded conception of social equality. Class-inequalities and gender-inequalities are dismissed as historical problems that have been successfully overcome and are no longer structural and all pervasive. This enables these inequalities to be muted, denied, and dismissed, whilst simultaneously allowing aggressive classism and sexism to thrive because it remains unnamed and unidentified as such. Therefore this study is relevant and worthwhile because it shines a light on the persistent classism and sexism that is rife in Britain by deconstructing the discourses of 'chav' women and 'Broken Britain'.

This study is theoretically relevant because it draws deeply on sociologist Stanley Cohen's concepts of moral panic and folk devils, as well as being guided by his perspective on deviance and social disharmony. Cohen's seminal *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers* published in 1972 was a study of the British 'sub-culture' war of the 1960s between Mods and Rockers. However the book is far more conceptual than it is descriptive. Through the subjects of Mods and Rockers Cohen sets out the concepts of moral panic and folk devils, which have far more to say about societal organisation, control, and the role of the mass media, than about Mods and Rockers themselves. Cohen ends his book stating, "...more moral panics will be generated and other, as yet nameless, folk devils will be created" and encourages students of sociology to recognise the implications of his argument and the validity of his concepts beyond the subject matter of Mods and Rockers (Cohen; 1980; 204). And this is precisely what this study does: apply Cohen's concepts of moral panic and folk devils to the contemporary subjects of 'Broken Britain' and 'chav' women. Thus this study's findings, and the ways in which they fit or don't fit with Cohen's concepts, are a modest contribution to the body of literature that has utilised the ideas of moral panic and folk devils since 1972.

Research Questions

Before setting out the research questions it is necessary to make clear from the outset how this topic is understood and subsequently approached: The entire study is grounded in discourse theory, and the concepts of *discourse* and *discursive practise* underpin it in its entirety. I conceptualise ‘chav’ women as something found in discourse, and that can only be understood *within* discourse, and subsequently argue that they should be understood as discursively constructed *folk devils* (Cohen; 1980). Likewise with ‘Broken Britain’. What is important to investigate is how -in contemporary British culture at this point in history- the ‘chav’ woman has discursively emerged as an excessively distorted, caricatured, and overburdened figure to which countless anxieties, panics, and problems have become affixed. The project’s over-arching research question is therefore:

How are ‘chav’ women discursively constructed as ‘folk devils’ in contemporary ‘Broken Britain’, and what are the notions of class and gender that underlie this construction?

The aim is not -and could not be- to ascertain whether the behaviour of working-class women is problematic, nor whether Britain is in fact experiencing a social crisis. Instead it is *how* does discourse produce the social reality of ‘chav’ woman and ‘Broken Britain’? The three sub-questions are similarly rooted in the concepts of discourse and discursive practise.

Sub- Question 1: How are class and gender historically interrelated in the United Kingdom, and how were working-class women subsequently represented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?

This question follows in the footsteps of post-structuralist scholars who stress that discourse cannot be understood without context and without history (Foucault; 1972; 32; Wodak; 2001; 2). Only by examining the interrelated histories of class and gender, the historical categorisation of working-class women, and the idea of moral panic, can we begin to unpack -and ultimately critique- the discourse of ‘chav’ women. Because all of these bodies of texts coexist, succeed, and have mutually reinforced one another to produce the body of discourse under analysis in this project

(Foucault; 1972; 32). Thus the problematised ‘chav’ woman has not materialised in a vacuum, as a discursive figure she is contextually, historically, and culturally specific, produced and maintained by different -intertwining- bodies of discourse.

Sub-Question 2: What is the social reality produced and experienced as real by discourses of ‘Broken Britain’ and ‘chavs’.

Central to this question is the idea of discourse as the force that constructs the social world. It aims to uncover how the inter-linked discourses of ‘chav’ women and moral panic in ‘Broken Britain’ have produced a social reality that is understood as solid and real. Within this world what does a ‘chav’ woman look like? How does she behave? Discourse has created a world in which ‘chavs’ are understood as ‘real’, and simultaneously a world in which Britain is under siege, and what does this world look like?

Sub-Question 3: What discursive practises produce this social reality, and what do they suggest about underlying notions of gender and class?

This question probes into how discourse produces a social reality that we experience as real, what are the practises -and even techniques- through which discourse functions to shape how we see, perceive and respond to the world around us? Following on from this the second part of the question asks what this social reality and its production suggest about underlying notions of gender and class.

The historical section of chapter two address the first sub-question, then a chapter of data-analysis is dedicated to answering each of sub-questions two and three. Taken together, this study aims to develop a multi-layered answer the over-arching question: *How are ‘chav’ women discursively constructed as ‘folk devils’ in contemporary ‘Broken Britain’, and what are the notions of class and gender than underlie this construction?* The aim of this project is not to pierce the ‘truth’ of class and gender in the UK, nor of morality and national decline, but instead to analyse the discourse, and in Michel Foucault’s words “...to maintain it in its consistency, to make it emerge in its own complexity” (Foucault; 1972; 52). Thus the aim is to deconstruct the discourse of ‘chav’ women and ‘Broken Britain’, in order that we can recognise the underlying notions of class and gender that have produced this contemporary folk

devil. So the ‘chav’ women discussed in the following chapters are not treated as a valid group, but as a recent discursive production. And thus this study’s goal is to critically uncover the historical roots, discursive practises, and gender and class inequalities that produce ‘chav’ women, rather than penetrate the ‘truth’ about this grouping.

Discourse and Discursive Practises

Before moving onto the methodology and research design it is necessary to establish what is actually meant by discourse. The term has been used so widely, variably, and ambiguously that it appears to mean everything and nothing, in one critic’s words “...the term is as vague as it is fashionable” (Widowson; 1995; 17). Whilst varying definitions are proffered by countless scholars (Whisnant; 2012; Wodak; 2001), the below definition by social scientists Phillips and Hardy is the one chosen to underpin this study:

We define a discourse as an interrelated set of texts, and the practises of their production, dissemination, and reception that bring an object into being.
(Phillips & Hardy; 2002; 3 - emphasis added)

In Phillips and Hardy’s definition discourse is made up of *texts* or *discursive units*, which come in a multitude of forms: written words, spoken words, pictures, film, symbols, and artefacts. The ways in which texts are produced, disseminated, upheld, and received are *discursive practises*, through which discourse functions, and is formed. And it is incomplete, ambiguous, and contradictory discourses that produce the social reality that we experience as solid and real (Phillips & Hardy; 2002; 1+4). Whilst discourse -and overlapping, contradictory, and incomplete *discourses*- are embodied and enacted in a variety of texts, discourse exists beyond the texts that produce them (Phillips & Hardy; 2002; 4). In Jager’s words discourses should be understood as “...intertwined or entangled with one another like vines or strands; moreover they are not static but in constant motion forming a ‘*discursive milling mass*’” (Jager; 2001; 35- emphasis added).

In utilising discourse as a concept it is necessary to refer to the philosopher Michel Foucault, who fundamentally argued that it is discourse that *creates our world*. Discourse shapes our perceptions, guides our associations, produces our

understandings, and determines our behaviour: it is what constitutes our existence as we know it (Foucault; 1972). And it is discourse that generates knowledge and truth; it shapes our consciousness and determines what is deemed 'true' or 'right' and what is not (Jager; 2001; 35). Thus the world as we experience it is constructed out of numerous, competing discourses that change over time, and according to context, and are embedded in power relations (Wodak; 2001; 4).

As a concept discourse is undoubtedly hard to pin down, and can pose the question of reality; how do we understand what is *real*? How do we get to the 'truth' through discourse? Scholars working with discourse reject this question, arguing that without discourse there *is* no social reality, so we can only *know* discourse and never reality (Finch; 1993; 5; Phillips & Hardy; 2002; 2). Foucault argues that we should not understand discourses as groups of signs that can be read and explained, but rather, as "...practises that systematically form the object" in question (Foucault; 1972; 54). Thus returning to Phillips and Hardy's definition, discourse is *both* the interrelated texts and the practises of their production, dissemination, and reception: and it is discourse that constructs the social world that we experience as real.

Discourse Analysis

The methodology of discourse analysis rests on this theory of discourse as socially constructive, and as such is as much a perspective on the social world as it is a set of tools for analysing it. Grounded in the belief that it is discourse that generates and constitutes the social world -and the phenomena within it- analysts are interested in discursive units and discursive practises *in their own right*- not as a way to access 'reality' or the 'truth' (Gill; 2000; 174). Whilst other qualitative approaches assume a social world and try to penetrate the meaning of this world for participants, discourse analysis instead asks how this social world was created, and how it is maintained. Thus the question becomes *how does discourse construct* the phenomena in question, not how does it reflect or reveal it, in Phillip and Hardy's words "...discourse analysis views discourses as constitutive of the social world- not a route to it" (Phillips & Hardy; 2002; 6). Discourse analysis is therefore a methodology that can potentially reveal the processes of social construction, allowing the analyst to unpack how phenomena, concepts, ideas, and perspectives are created and maintained, and crucially, what are the consequences of this and for whom.

Research Design: Discourse Analysis and the ‘Chav’ Woman

As already stated, the analysis focuses on ‘chav women’ as *discursive constructs* or *discursive figures*, and the history and processes involved in their emergence and maintenance. Meaning that I do not analyse discourse in order to reveal the ‘truth’ about working-class women and their lives, but to understand how and why the very concept of a ‘working-class woman’ or a ‘chav’ women -as we know it now- came to be. This does not imply that the women appearing in the discursive units are not real, living breathing human beings- that they somehow don’t exist. But instead to emphasise that the ways in which these women are classified, known, and understood, is determined and maintained by discourse. Thus I conceptualise ‘chav’ women as discursively constituted social ‘types’ within a broader social reality that we recognise as solid and real, which could in fact be completely different.

In terms of style -within the methodology of discourse analysis- this research is a mix of interpretive structuralism and critical discourse analysis. Interpretive structuralism falls under the broad heading of Constructivist approaches, but what distinguishes it is a broader approach than the more fine-grained linguistic ones in its analysis of social context and discourse (Phillips & Hardy; 2002; 23). This study also draws on critical discourse analysis in that it is not neutral; it embeds the data in the social in an attempt to reveal the classist and sexist representation of ‘chav’ women. What remains to be set out is which discursive units were analysed, and *how* they were analysed. (I have opted to use the term discursive units –despite the inherent faulty suggestion that the units make up a ‘whole’- because I find the more common term of texts to be confusing in reference to spoken words or images.)

One body of discursive units were drawn from the mass media, following Cohen’s argument that the media plays the crucial role in inciting and prolonging moral panics, and in constructing folk devils. Articles -on or relating to the women understood as ‘chav women’- from a variety of mass newspapers across the ideological spectrum were analysed, ranging in time between 2009 to the recent months of 2013. The right-leaning broadsheets analysed were *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph*, the left-leaning broadsheets were *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, and the tabloid under analysis was *The Sun*. I collected articles from *flare* moments in the inter-linked ‘Broken Britain’/‘chav’ woman discourse, as well as more sustained and less high-profile coverage focusing on themes like women living on state subsidies. The voices of what Cohen refers to as ‘moral entrepreneurs’ -those

politicians and public figures that seize on events to set out their moral agenda- were prevalent in the newspaper articles and thus were analysed too.

The remaining discursive units are web-based and therefore relatively ‘new’, following Phillips and Hardy’s argument that it is *changes in texts, new textual forms, and new systems of distributing texts* that constitute a discourse over time (Phillips & Hardy; 2002; 5). The ‘new’ and changing discursive units that I incorporated are reader’s comments in response to newspaper articles, forums, and pornography. I chose to analyse reader’s comments on newspaper articles because these constitute a very contemporary form of *interactive* discursive practise, and cast great light on the naturalised and common assumptions that support the *chav* woman discourse. Comments offer a unique insight into what is not said by the media -*what does not need to be said*- because of the taken-for-granted values discourse has instilled in the readers, and society at large. Other new textual forms that I collected were from interactive websites such as *Urban Dictionary* or *Chav Town* and the ‘*chav*’ pornography that is prevalent -and highly popular- online. I selected the pornographic films by first quickly viewing a relatively wide range of the ‘*chav*’ porn available, after realising it was all very similar I picked ten at random from those with the highest number of hits and analysed them as part of the data. Reading the forums, and especially viewing the pornographic images and film offered great insight into the social world that the discourse have constructed; what ‘*chav*’ women look like, how they behave, how they have sex- as well as what ‘Broken Britain’ *looks and feels* like.

The starting point for how these discursive units were actually analysed was the suspension of belief in the taken-for-granted. In order to effectively engage in discourse analysis the first step has to be to ‘render the familiar strange’: to break completely from habitualised ways of reading and seeing (Gill; 200; 178). The focus must be shifted from drawing out underlying meanings and hidden ‘truths’, and trained onto the construction, organisation, and function of the discourse instead. This interrogation of assumptions, a rupture with how we habitually make sense of life, was perhaps the most challenging part of the research. Taking a fundamental step-back, I attempted to shake-off my understanding of the most basic values, concepts, and ideas. This is recognised as particularly difficult when the researcher is part of the culture in question, and is very familiar with the context. In this regard, writing for non-British readers was a benefit in that it demanded that common phrases, terms, and

history be explained (Phillips & Jorgensen; 2002; 21). To guide myself through this ‘rendering the familiar strange’ I posed the following questions when reading or viewing each discursive unit:

- What common truths does it appeal to? What is ‘normal’, ‘right’, ‘good’, ‘proper’, ‘incomprehensible’, and so on.
- Why am I reading it this way? What features of the discursive unit have produced this reading?
- What roles do images, or film, play in determining how it is understood?
- What is *not* said? What is the function of silences and vagueness?
- What is implicit and what is insinuated?
- How are things, themes, and issues connected and disconnected? How is one thing made relevant to another?

With the above questions as a guide, I carried out close-readings, and close-viewings, of the discursive units. These were a mixture of newspaper articles and their images, some with comments that ranged between 12 to 1800 in number, as well as extracts from forums and pornographic films and images. Altogether these diverse data sources made up just over 220 discursive units. I coded as inclusively as possible, aiming to uncover patterns, links, variables, ruptures, and consistencies in the results.

The idea of ‘saturation’ in data collection became an impossibility as the potential data relevant for this study was so vast, and the discursive practises and participation so extensive. Thus I stopped gathering data when strong patterns and results were re-occurring, and I felt able to justify and explain an interesting answer to the research question based on the results. Furthermore the ideas of validity (that the results capture the ‘real world’) and reliability (that the results are repeatable) are not applicable in discourse analysis. The method is inherently subjective, and there is no ‘recipe’ or set of steps that could be followed (Phillips & Hardy; 2002; 74-79). In

spite of this a strong argument may be presented and justified, and the results proven to be legitimate. I have attempted this by first providing this detailed narrative of how the research was designed, by analysing and including deviant discursive units that did not ‘fit in’ with my argument at the outset, and finally, by including the web-links to each discursive unit in a secondary bibliography, and thus inviting alternative readings from the reader. Ultimately though a discourse analysis, by nature, is an *interpretation*, albeit one that can be warranted by detailed argument, attention to detail in the data, and strong theoretical underpinnings (Gill; 2000; 188).

Outline of the Study

This chapter has set out the topic and context of study - ‘chav’ women and ‘Broken Britain’ - the reader should feel adequately familiarised with these to proceed through the thesis. Chapter one also set out the relevance of the topic, the conceptual underpinnings, the research questions and design, and the concept of discourse.

Chapter two introduces the theoretical frame around which the rest of the thesis takes shape. Three diverse frames come together to help facilitate an understanding of the topic, and facilitate how to conduct the research accordingly. The first is a historical frame that discusses post-structuralist histories of the emergence of class - and the importance of gender within its emergence- as well as the ways in which working class women have been historically represented. The second frame draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu to set out a basis from which class can be understood and approached. The final frame is Stanley Cohen’s theory of folk devils and moral panics, which underlies the study throughout.

In chapter three the first grouping of data results is set out, with the aim of establishing the discursively created social reality of ‘Broken Britain’ and ‘chav’ women. This chapter goes into detail about what exactly ‘Broken Britain’ is, and whom ‘chav’ woman are- as the data tells it.

Chapter four continues to deliver data results, this time examining the discursive practises that construct the social reality discussed in the previous chapter, and then by examining what all of this can tell us about underlying notions of gender and class. Finally, the conclusion summarises the thesis and offers an answer to the overarching research question.

Chapter 2

Hybridly framing ‘chavs’ and ‘Broken Britain’

Introduction

This chapter sets out the theoretical frame that shapes how the topic is conceptualised and approached. Three diverse theoretical lenses come together to support the research, a section of this chapter is dedicated to each one in the following order:

The first is a *historical* frame, which draws upon post-structuralist accounts of the eighteenth and nineteenth century as the critical period for understanding the intertwined emergence of class and gender as we know it today. This section also addresses the first sub-question: *‘how are class and gender historically interrelated in the UK, and how were working-class women subsequently represented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?’* This section argues that working-class women were problematised and even demonised across the axis of morality, gender, and sexuality. Drawing on post-structuralist readings of history, the ‘working-class woman’ is understood as a discursive construct that emerged -or was created- during this period. And that the discursive figure of the working class woman was in fact crucial in the creation of the *entire* class system.

The second theoretical layer sets out a conceptualisation of *class*, from which the thesis can argue that ‘chav’ women *are* working-class women, and that contemporary ‘post-class’ rhetoric permits the vilification of certain working-class women by denying the existence of class divisions. By employing Pierre Bourdieu’s relational theorisation of class we can recognise the classist underpinnings of the figure of the ‘chav’ woman.

The third and final theoretical thread is Stanley Cohen’s concepts of *moral panic* and *folk devils*. Firstly the concept of moral panic is set out and it is argued that ‘Broken Britain’ is best understood as a moral panic. From here, the ‘chav’ woman can be conceptualised as this contemporary panic’s folk devil; the symbolic cipher to which all that is negative comes to be attached.

Historical Frame

Inequalities between groups of people have most likely been constant throughout history, however *class* -as we know it- emerged alongside the economic and social changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prior to this period, stratification was understood through the more varied and ambiguous concepts of ranks, orders, and degrees (Briggs; 1983; 3). The class system did not coherently emerge fully formed; rather, it was the result of a process -a discursive campaign- that gave birth to the categories 'middle class' and 'working class'. During this period the discursive figure of the working-class woman emerged for the first time, and this figure was in fact pivotal in the creation of the wider class system. This argument can be made by drawing on the works of key historians and social scientists who have followed Michel Foucault's break with the Rankean tradition of history -which aims to extract the 'truth' of the period- and instead focus on uncovering *conditions of emergence* (Foucault; 1972; Finch; 1993; Weeks; 1981; Nead; 1988; Walkowitz; 1980). All of the authors cited emphasise the salient role that gender, morality, and female sexuality played in the emergence of the classes rather than that of wealth, labour markets, or systems of production.

It is only by connecting the contemporary discourse of the 'chav' women to those that preceded it that can we begin to understand it (Wodak; 2001; 4). And so this section does not provide a history of working-class women, but instead a history of the discourses of representation of working-class women.

The Middle Class 'Discovery' of the Working Class

The first 'class' was the middle class- its emergence antedates that of its working class counterpart. The emerging urban industrial economy produced a social grouping which self-articulated itself as a new 'middle' class (Briggs; 1983; 3). This grouping contained a diverse range of occupational groups and income levels, and was by no means a single and unified entity, yet throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it strove to establish a shared *class identity* that would set it apart from other societal groups (Nead; 1988; 5).

The quest for a common class identity was largely propelled by the doubts and anxieties brought upon by the rapid changes of the era. Debates became prominent about the consequences of urbanisation and industrialisation, the emergence of the

urban poor, and the fears and insecurities that this unknown grouping inspired (Mahood; 1990; 51; Davis; 1988; 64). What emerged was a huge middle-class enterprise consisting of environmentalists, politicians, philanthropists, journalists, and novelists who set about observing this unfamiliar group (Finch; 1993; 7). The nature of this project has been likened to a social and anthropological exploration, a mission to understand an alien group, probe into their Otherness, with the aim of eventually describing, analysing, and regulating them (Mahood; 1990; 52; Weeks; 1981; 32). And this middle-class mission became vested with significance, it became so charged with meaning that it promised to reveal ‘the condition of Britain’; this unknown group -the urban poor- became a signifier of nation, empire, and the British way of life (Davis; 1998; 64).

It is sociologist and historian Lynette Finch who has developed the most detailed account of the pivotal role that poor women occupied in this explorative enterprise. She recounts in detail how environmentalists conducted surveys that began the articulation and categorisation of the working class. These surveys were originally underpinned by the theme of *morality*- thus placing the focus disproportionately on women. Surveyors wanted to know the values, morals, and beliefs poor women held, how they kept their homes cared for their families, and how they understood social order and progress (Finch; 1993; 13). From the middle of the nineteenth century the focus of the surveys changed to sexuality; surveyors probed into poor women’s sexual practises (Finch; 1993; 13) (Foucault; 1972).

What is crucial is that it was these surveys –centred on morality and female sexuality, *not* income or labour- that produced the working class. This group was further divided along these lines into the respectable and unrespectable working class, or the moral poor and the immoral poor. Finch concludes that these already constituted groupings were handed to Karl Marx, who went on to develop them as the proletariat and the lumpenproletariat (Finch; 1993; 10). Thus, within Finch’s account, women did not fit into the class system by proxy -via their fathers and husbands- but rather were central to the discursive construction of the class system on account of their perceived morality and sexuality.

These surveys, alongside the wider middle-class exploratory enterprise, gave birth to the discursive construct of the working-class. The ideas, understandings, and impressions it produced of the working-class further served to consolidate the middle-class collective identity. ‘Knowing’ the working-class allowed the middle-class to

comparatively measure itself, to understand its distinctiveness- it sketched out the ‘abnormal’ against which the middle-class was to take comfort in its ‘normality’ (Finch; 1993; 9).

Following on from the ‘discovery’ of the working-class, the question arises of *how* it was constructed- how was this classification represented and understood?

Unsurprisingly, the discursive representation was almost undeviatingly a negative one relying on a two-dimensional caricature of the urban poor.

The working-class were understood to be immoral, unreasonable, anti-social, disorderly, pathological, and dangerous. As well as inarticulate, primitive, and stupid. They were brought to life through metaphors and imagery of filth, pollution, and infection. Furthermore this class was perceived as *looking* different; they smelled, their bodies were grotesque. This physical deterioration was held to be indicative of their fundamental nature- they were sub-human to the point that they did not know pleasure or love, appeared to be driven by some dark and alien impulse, and were vicious and libidinal in equal measure (Skeggs; 1997; 4; Jones; 2012; 109; Orwell; 1975; Nead; 1988; 37; Keating; 1971). The middle class came to understand the urban areas that housed the working-class as “stagnant pools of moral filth” that comprised the “effluvia” of changing cities (Davis; 1988; 19).

Sketching the Working Class Woman

In short, the working class were demonised from the outset of their discursive creation. ‘Working-class women’ were vilified in a particular -and I argue- heightened way. Poor women were represented as especially repellent, as embodying what was *most* disturbing and alien about their class (Davis; 1988; 75).

The ‘working-class woman’ was coded first as immoral. This lack of morals was mainly attributed to her failures in the realm of motherhood and the home, her perceived rejection of the middle class’ prize values of domesticity. In the eyes of middle-class observers this *dehumanised* her, her perceived lack of emotions, values, and morals cast her as somewhat animalistic, and therefore savage (Davis; 1988; 76; Keating; 1971; 5). Sexuality was also central to the ‘working-class woman’s’ portrayal. She was understood to be driven by a dangerous and abnormally voracious sexuality, and her prolific breeding of degenerate offspring was understood as both a social menace and as a threat to the nation itself (Davis; 1988; 70).

This disturbing morality and sexuality was understood to be reflected in appearance. Through middle class eyes everything about ‘working-class women’ was saturated with; their hair, clothes, bodies, homes, the food they ate, and the way they spoke (Lawler; 2005; 436). This discursive construction of working-class woman may be summarised using an example, the character of Clem in the 1889 novel ‘Netherworld’. Middle-class author Gissing compares her to “a rank, evilly fostered growth”, her every action imbued with a “slothful sensuality”, embodying an “all-consuming animality”, a “sadistic love of violence”, a “crude sensuality” who - tellingly- “starves her children half to death” (Gissing; 1989). Perhaps what was most disturbing about this type of ‘working-class woman’ in the eyes of the middle class, was the supposed *choice* to be this way- their lifestyle was framed as deliberate, their rejection of all that was understood as ‘right’ and ‘normal’ was conceptualised as an exercise of will (Finch; 1993; 37).

The Discursive Figure of the ‘Prostitute’

One ‘type’ of woman came to symbolise the problematised female working-class in particular: the ‘prostitute’. Of course -as in every historical period- there were people exchanging sex for resources, yet the *figure* of the Victorian ‘prostitute’ introduced here was in fact a new discursive construct. The ‘prostitute’ became an object of fascination and disgust, an emotionally charged creation, who embodied a constellation of concerns about class, morality, gender, and sexuality. The aforementioned middle-class enterprise attested that prostitution was the greatest threat to the nation, thus initiating a period of obsessive focus targeting certain women

Interestingly in light of the topic of this thesis, scholars have argued that the category of the ‘prostitute’ was not fixed or internally coherent, instead it was flexible and accommodating, and essentially could be used to denote any woman who transgressed the middle class idea of respectable femininity and sexuality. It “...stood as a metaphor for immorality in general” in Nead’s words (Nead; 1988; 94). Thus mill-girls, unmarried mothers, or simply women who congregated in public spaces in a manner deemed unruly, could be cast as ‘prostitutes’ (Mahood; 1990; 70). The ‘prostitute’ was a folk-devil of the Victorian period, and the parallels with the ‘chav’ woman can already begin to be understood.

Summary: The Discursive Construction of the 'Working Class Woman'

Now to return to the question - *how are class and gender historically interrelated in the UK, and how were working-class women subsequently represented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?* It can be argued that gender was at the heart of the emergence of the class system; the figure of the 'working class woman' was a necessary component in the hierarchy's birth. Middle-class observers imposed the label of 'working-class' onto the urban poor, and assigned a heightened symbolic significance to the women amongst this group. Without the figure of the 'working class woman' the class system we know today would be irrevocably different, and thus gender and class simply cannot be separated. To address the second part of the question, 'working class women' were represented in almost exclusively negative terms, often as representative of the most dangerous elements of society. Ideas of gendered morality, a feminine ideal, and sexuality came together to determine the nature of this demonization.

As discussed, the main tenet of fledgling middle class identity was morality; articulated through the values of the home, the family, domesticity and all that was considered 'right' and 'normal' in this realm. In their efforts to draw an analytical and ideological line between themselves and the urban poor, the middle-class referred to this moral framework, and concluded that the seeming lack of family values, dysfunctional homes, and the absent qualities of nurture, love, and compassion they observed amongst the poor were evidence of the immorality of the working-class, and particularly of 'working-class women'. In being cast as unmotherly and undomesticated, the 'working class' woman was framed as the embodiment of moral decline, and as a signifier of something unnatural and deeply disturbing.

The emergence of the middle class also brought with it 'the feminine ideal': what constituted the appropriate *gender role* for women (Gorham; 1982). Femininity was enacted through middle class notions of what constituted an appropriate appearance, and the dedication to the roles of wife and mother, as well as cleanliness and domesticity. The successful embodiment of this 'feminine ideal' not only constituted the 'perfect lady' or the 'respectable woman', but crucially it also defined what was normal, healthy, and right. Within the paradigm of the 'feminine ideal' working-class women were represented as *unfeminine*, or as embodying a deviant and dangerous femininity. On account of their perceivably decrepit homes, dissipated physical appearances, truncated emotions, failure as mothers, coarseness and vulgarity. This

failure to meet the ‘feminine ideal’ not only cast them as deviants, but it also went a long way in coding them as sub-human, animalistic, and pathological. In this period - and I will argue in the present one too- an unfeminine woman was deemed as a threat to the very ‘nature of things’, of all that was ‘right’ and ‘normal’, and therefore as a danger to society itself.

Finally, working-class women were historically demonised in the realm of sexuality. This is unsurprising since the emergence of class came alongside the emergence of sexuality as formulated by Michel Foucault; the period was defined by a fascination with, and discourse about, sexuality (Foucault; 1978). Of course it was the middle class who first ‘deployed’ sexuality, defining what constituted normal and abnormal practises and behaviours. This deployment of sexuality became a crucial tool for drawing class lines, and in the discursive representation of the working-class as the ultimate ‘Other’ (Weeks; 1981; 23). The sexuality of ‘working-class women’, the perceived threat it posed, and the subsequent obsession it became is evidenced in the *figure* of the ‘prostitute’. Over and above immorality and unfemininity, the ‘prostitute’ symbolised ‘working-class’ women’s sexuality; threatening, infectious, debased, and animal-like, as well as dangerously over-fertile.

Closely connected to this axis of sexuality is that of fetishisation and desire. The analytical zeal with which middle-class observers approached the behaviour, bodies, and sexual practises of working-class women arguably bordered on voyeurism (Davidoff; 1983; 43). Diaries belonging to such observers have since been published that illustrate the extent to which working-class women became a private obsession, in some the self-proclaimed disgust fails to conceal a tendency to eroticise, whilst in others the fascination is explicitly expressed in fetishistic terms (Kincaid; 1996) (Cullwick & Stanley; 1984)

Summary

In summary then, this section has provided a historical frame from which we can begin to understand the ‘chav’ woman. Reviewing this literature offers a *history of emergence* of the discursive figure of the working-class woman. Crucially, the literature also illustrates how the discursive production of working-class women was by no means inconsequential. To the contrary, it was axial in the emergence of the entire class hierarchy, and the creation of the figure of the working-class woman was essential for the flourishing of ‘middle-classness’.

It is also clear from the literature that working-class women were historically demonised, reviled, and feared, while at the same time constituting objects of fascination. This discursive figure was represented as a troubling, disgusting, and alien deviant, and unsurprisingly became somewhat fetishised through this discursive process.

The parallels between the Victorian ‘working-class woman’ and the contemporary ‘chav’ women are evident. A strong argument can be proposed that the ‘chav’ woman is a recycled and updated version of her Victorian counterpart, or perhaps a simple continuation of the role assigned to poor women in the drawing-up of societal lines. By setting out this historical frame, the discourse of the ‘chav’ woman becomes located in the broader discourses of class, gender, and sexuality since the eighteenth century.

Class Frame

To approach this topic is imperative to set out a decisive theoretical framing of the concept of class. This section therefore introduces Pierre Bourdieu’s relational theorising of class as the frame for this study. But before engaging with Bourdieu it is first necessary to sketch the context of class in contemporary Britain: the ‘death of class’, the ‘underclass’, and the ‘chav’ phenomenon. This discussion illustrates how tenacious class remains -however re-routed or disguised- and therefore the importance of using the Bourdieuan framework to recognise the class system in its contemporary form. And ultimately, to frame the demonization of ‘chav’ women as the classist phenomenon that it is.

‘Class is everywhere and it is nowhere’: The Contemporary Context

The United Kingdom has been widely recognised as one of -if not the most- class-ridden nations in the ‘western’ world. Yet since the 1980s, class has been disappearing as an academic site of analysis and as a central tenet of wider social and political discourse (Savage et al; 2001; 876).

The theoretical rejection of class as an outdated concept is predominantly attributed to the post-modern shift, which has attacked traditional Marxist theory for its reductionist theoretical metanarrative of the antagonism between capital and labour

(Bradley; 1996; 46). Yet the key proponents of the ‘death of class’ extend their argument beyond Marx to attack *all* class-analytical frameworks, arguing that no interpretation of class can cast light on social inequalities today, and that we are quite simply in a ‘post-class’ world (Pakulski & Waters; 1996b; 1; Pahl; 1993; Holter & Turner; 1994). These theorists do not deny that social inequalities persist, but simply reject class as having any purchase in casting light on them. The net effect is that *all* class-based approaches have become increasingly rare -and unfashionable- in academia.

The demise of class as an analytical category has been mirrored in the past 30 years with a post-class *political* rhetoric of inclusion, classlessness, individualism, and social mobility (Tyler; 2008; 20). The Thatcherite assault on the working class, and the wider Conservative attack on the romanticised figure of the ‘noble worker’ set in motion the zeitgeist that being working class was no longer something to take pride in (Jones; 2012; x). This post-class rhetoric extended across the political right and left, with the Labour party declaring in the 1990s that ‘we are all middle class now’ (Prescott; 1997) and that Britain had become a ‘Meritocracy’ (Blair; 1996).

Interestingly, alongside the rejection of class in academia, and the simultaneous attack on, and denial of, the working-class in the political sphere, the discourse of the ‘underclass’ emerged. Whilst originating from the US, the term ‘underclass’ has become a keyword in the political, academic, and social vocabulary (Lister; 1996; 2). Scholar Charles Murray came to the UK in the late 1980s and confirmed that an ‘underclass’ had emerged in the UK, returning four years later to declare the crisis had deepened (Murray; 1990 & 1994).

Central to Murray’s argument is that not *all* the poor constitute the ‘underclass’, it is specifically those distinguished by their threatening and undesirable behaviour, thus it refers not to a degree of poverty but a *type* of poverty (Murray; 1990; 24; Green; 1990; 19). He argues that the ‘underclass’ develops its own set of cultural and moral values, sharply different to those of the wider population, and in this sense the ‘underclass’ has consciously withdrawn from society (Morris; 1994; 1; Bradley; 1996; 49). It may be hard to understand that Murray’s morally hysterical hyperbole of a ‘different world’ and ‘spreading disease’ was attended to at all, yet it was, and the impact of the concept and language of the ‘underclass’ is not to be underestimated (Lister; 1996; 9).

The ‘underclass’ hypothesis suggests a society split between the middle class and aspiring poor and the ‘underclass’, along the lines of *values, morality, and lifestyle*. What is particularly significant in the context of this argument is the explicit gender agenda underlying Murray’s theory. In the first report illegitimacy tops the list of factors in a more generalised account of the ‘underclass’, in the second Murray is singularly preoccupied with single mothers, marriage, and the state of the British family (Murray; 1990 & 1994). Murray observes that illegitimacy has “sky-rocketed” since 1979 and that it is concentrated in the “lowest social class”, and stresses that these ‘underclass’ single mothers *should* be stigmatised –with entire sections of the second report dedicated to ‘*the importance of blame*’ and ‘*the importance of moral judgment*’- in efforts to avert a looming social time-bomb (Murray; 1994; 86; Murray; 1990; 27-34). His view is that the problem of the ‘underclass’ is rooted in the failure of poor single mothers to adequately socialise their children, thus illegitimacy breeds the ‘underclass’ and “...in this concentration of illegitimate births lies a generational catastrophe” (Murray; 1994; 29).

Lawler argues that the shift from working-class to ‘underclass’ can be seen as a feminising one. The romanticised, masculine, and ‘noble’ proletarian worker vanished from academic and political imaginations and was replaced by an ‘underclass’ of morally corrupt single mothers (Lawler; 2005; 436). In other words, in the vacuum left by the ‘death’ of class what remains is an ‘underclass’ with a feminine face.

To delve deeper yet, in British ‘post-class’ society, ‘chav’ has emerged as a term that names, and identifies, those with the lowest social status without doing so in explicit class terminology- as detailed in chapter one. Thus whilst class is no longer *directly articulated* in academia or political rhetoric, portrayals of the working-class persist, but are re-routed to avoid explicit reference to social class (Lawler; 2005; 431; Tyler; 2008; 20). In many ways the discourse of the ‘chav’ has followed in the footsteps of Murray’s ‘underclass’; the rhetoric is justified by stressing that not all the poor working-class are under attack, only those who *choose* unacceptable behaviour and lifestyles. Within this context the ‘chav’ discourse has opened the floodgates for an outpouring of thinly veiled class hatred, ridicule, and condescension.

Thus it appears that great efforts have been put into confirming that we are in a post-class society at the same time as economic polarisation has reached unparalleled heights, and the discourse of the ‘chav’ and ‘underclass’ have emerged and become entrenched. I argue that any claims that deny class in this context of inequality are

grounded in static notions of what class constitutes. My understanding of class is rooted in the *relational*, rather than substantive, and thus I use a Bourdieuan lens rather than a Marxist one. If such a relational perspective is taken, and the romantic image of the politically united masculine proletariat is dismissed, it is evident that despite the great changes of the twentieth century class divisions remain entrenched. Arguing in the same vein Beverley Skeggs states that not only does class persist, but also that it is more hybridly internalised than before:

...class is so insinuated in the intimate making of the self and culture that it is more ubiquitous than previously articulated, it is more difficult to pin down, leaking beyond traditional measures of classification.

(Skeggs; 2005; 968)

This can be summarised in the phrase “class is everywhere and it is nowhere”, whilst class is not named or articulated it underlies every site, encounter, and discourse in contemporary Britain (Bradley; 1996; 45).

Pierre Bourdieu

Most scholars theorising the ‘chav’ woman have used Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of social class in order to reveal how this ‘type’ of woman has come to function as a crucial mechanism within contemporary class hierarchy (Skeggs; 2012; Lawler; 2005; Tyler; 2008) This is because Bourdieu’s relational analysis of class is more suitable than a traditional substantive Marxist analysis, as it exposes the continuity of class divisions despite significant economic and social changes (Bourdieu; 1985; 723; Lawler; 2005; 840). This section very briefly outlines Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of class through the conceptual tools of capitals, the habitus, and symbolic power. Following from this, the representation of ‘chav’ women is approached through a Bourdieuan framework. Finally, using Bourdieu’s theory, the idea that the representation of ‘chav’ women is bound up with ‘middle-classness’ is set out.

Bourdieu sets out a social world, or social space, in which class is shaped by access to four forms of *capital*, these capitals confer strength, power, and profit- or lack of. The first is economic capital; income, wealth, inheritance, monetary assets, in other words

what one owns. The second is *cultural capital* -or informational capital- that can exist in three forms: in the embodied state (dispositions of the mind and body), the objectified state (cultural goods such as books and art), and the institutionalised state (such as a university degree). The third is *social capital*; the assets of connections, networks, group membership- in other words *who you know*. The final form of capital is *symbolic capital*, which is the form that the aforementioned capitals take when they are recognised as legitimate, and thus become valuable, and can then be capitalised on (Bourdieu; 1987; 4; Skeggs; 2012; 270). Individuals are distributed in social space on account of their *volume* of accumulated capital, and the *composition* of their capital. In other words they are assigned a position -or a social class- in relation to these forms of capital (Bourdieu; 1987; 4).

Individuals are assigned a position, experience similar conditions and social *conditioning* to their neighbours, and from this, the system of *class habitus* becomes observable (Bourdieu; 1987; 5). For Bourdieu the habitus is a system that simultaneously produces and generates unified practises, *as well as* producing a shared perception, classification, and appreciation of these practises (Bourdieu; 1989; 19) (Bourdieu; 1985; 170). Simply put, because of a shared position in social space, members of a social class will act similarly; their practises will be unified into a common lifestyle (Bourdieu; 1984; 172). Simultaneously their perception and appreciation of their lifestyle -and the lifestyles of the other class- are understood and classified through the habitus (Bourdieu; 1984; 170). Within the system of class habitus, lifestyles are ‘sign systems’; they are indicators of social class (Bourdieu; 1984; 172). Furthermore within the world of class habitus, there is a world of *common sense*; individuals are imbued with an instinctive sense of ‘their place’ and of the ‘place of others’ (Bourdieu; 1989; 19). Bourdieu describes this as a ‘class unconscious’, as it is the mainly subconscious internalisation of the class based social order (Bourdieu; 1985; 278).

Bourdieu sets out a differential and relational social world, and in order to understand the inequalities within this world, he outlines his idea of *symbolic power*. One class comes to dominate another by imposing *their* vision of the world, their perspective borne of their habitus, as *the* legitimate vision of the world: they define how the social world *should be* (Bourdieu; 1987; 15). Agents and classes are unequally armed in the struggle to impose their vision, as a result of their symbolically recognized volume and combination of capital, the middle class are able

to enforce their values and vision as legitimate (Bourdieu; 1987; 11). This is done through the endless *work of representation*, in which the more powerful class represents its ‘Other’, and itself (Bourdieu; 1985; 727). The work of *representation* forms part of a larger effort of *group making* in which differences and distinctions that previously existed only implicitly between individuals, are made explicit and visible, these individuals are made into a group (Bourdieu; 1989; 23; Bourdieu; 1987; 10). Within this imposition of difference by the powerful, the schemata of classifications and words, and the act of naming are incredibly significant; they are the “stake par excellence” of the class struggle (Bourdieu; 1989; 20). A crucial consequence of the powerful class imposing its vision and values is that it thereby has a monopoly on *taste*, it adjudicates what is tasteful and what is vulgar, and thus taste, lifestyle, and consumer choices, come to distinguish social class (Bourdieu; 1984; 176).

The unequal distribution of symbolic power allow the middle class to impose their vision of the world, and according to Bourdieu through the imposition of their vision they effectively *construct* the world, in accordance with their taste and values (Bourdieu; 1987; 10; Bourdieu 50; 1989; 23). Within Bourdieu’s paradigm the imposition and maintenance of this vision, and the subsequent judgments, discrimination, and divisions it produces, amounts to symbolic violence.

The ‘Chav’ Woman in Bourdieu’s Framework

Framing the representation of the figure of the ‘chav’ woman within Bourdieu’s theory of class is valuable in two key ways. Firstly, it unequivocally affirms that this representation is a function of *class*, in contemporary Britain the ideas that class has ‘died out’, that ‘we’re all middle class now’ often obscure the classist nature of this portrayal. Secondly, whilst all of Bourdieu’s tools can be applied to the ‘chav’ woman, his focus on *representation* as the crux of symbolic power suggests how paramount the ‘chav’ woman is within the contemporary class hierarchy.

The starting point of Bourdieu’s framework is the various forms of capital. Working class women who are depicted as ‘chavs’ can be understood as impoverished in terms of capital, and thus assigned a low position in social space. The women who constitute the ‘chav’ figure are thus weak, their lack of capital -or the failure to symbolically recognise their forms of capital as legitimate- truncates their ability to move through social space (Skeggs; 2012; 270). The idea of *habitus* also allows the

classist nature of these representations to become clearer. The dissemination of the figure of the 'chav' woman in popular discourse depends on the class-based 'world of common sense' that Bourdieu puts his finger on, the recognition of the 'chav' woman is reliant on the intuitive awareness of class still engrained in the British (Bourke; 1994; 1). Bourdieu's emphasis on how the class habitus produces common practises, lifestyles, and values, also explains how it is *possible* to create such a coherent and unified stereotype of the working class. There *are* differences between lifestyles across the classes, and rather than the portrayal of the 'chav' being an elaborative and fictitious fabrication of the middle class, it picks up on these class differences produced within the habitus.

It is Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic power and symbolic violence, however that brings the most insight to the contemporary 'chav' woman's portrayal. Through Bourdieu, we can see that the very existence of the female 'chav' figure is an indication of the dominant symbolic power of the middle class, vis-à-vis the working class. The aggressively systematic depiction of 'chav' women throughout public discourse and popular culture can be recognised as 'the endless work of representation' which is how the middle class both attain and maintain their disproportionate symbolic power (Bourdieu; 1985; 727). By representing working class women as 'chavs' -by naming and categorizing them this way- the middle class bring them into existence, they now form a recognisable and coherent group (Bourdieu; 1989; 23). The prominence and hyper-visibility of the 'chav' woman thus suggests that this figure plays a central role in the maintenance of the contemporary class system, she is integral in distinguishing across groups, or classes.

Furthermore the physical stereotype of the 'chav' woman as disgusting in her appearance and behaviour is indicative of the middle class monopoly of taste (Lawler; 2005; 440). What legitimates the judgment that 'chav' women are tasteless, vulgar, unattractive, and even repulsive, is the class hierarchy, in which the middle class have defined what is 'tasteful' and what is 'right'.

For Pierre Bourdieu this 'work of representation' is ultimately how the middle classes distinguish themselves, the practise through which they define *their* identity (Bourdieu; 51; 727). Thus the representation of the 'chav' woman must be understood within the context of 'middle-classness', in the same way as its Victorian equivalent.

The articulation of the ‘chav’ woman as aesthetically, performatively, and morally different casts her as the ‘Other’ (Hollingworth & Williams; 2009; 474). What is interesting is how the figure exists to produce the middle class that is reliant on *not* being its repellent and debased ‘Other’ (Lawler; 2005; 430). The portrayal of ‘chav’ women thus functions as a kind of collective middle class reassurance.

Summary

This section’s purpose was two-fold; first to dispute claims of a ‘post-class’ society and the notion that ‘chavs’ are not class-based representations, and second to set out a Bourdieuan frame through which the ‘chav’ woman can be conceptualised as a crucial component of the contemporary class hierarchy.

I argue that discourses of classlessness *are* in fact class discourses, as they operate in the interests of the middle class by denying their privilege. The orthodoxy of classlessness, individualism, and social mobility masks the dominance of middle class perspectives in society, and explains poverty as a behavioural or lifestyle choice. Reah has referred to post-class discourse as ‘diversionary rhetoric’ (Reah; 1997; 261), to which I would add the popular discourse of gender equality in the UK (Scharff; 2011; McRobbie; 2009; Modleski; 1991; Brooks; 1997). The dissolution of class and gender as structural explanations for life outcomes suggests that Britain *has* become ‘Meritocracy’, that class and gender based prejudice are relics of a bygone age. I position my argument in direct opposition to this orthodoxy, by investigating how working-class women continue to be demonised within this ‘post-class’ and ‘post-sexism’ age. My understanding of class is rooted in Bourdieu’s theory and is thus always relational and not substantive. And throughout this thesis I use the term ‘working-class’ despite its problematic connotations, and contested meanings, as a tool to contradict this ‘post-class’ discourse. By using the term ‘working-class’ instead of attempting to coin a new -more nuanced one- I resist entering into the ‘diversionary rhetorics’ that mask the sustained prejudices directed at poor women. And this overarching argument developed throughout the thesis is reliant on the concepts and tools that Bourdieu offers for deconstructing the ‘chav’ discourse to render visible its classist underpinnings.

Folk Devils and Moral Panics Frame

Stanley Cohen's massively influential work 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics' introduced the concept of moral panic, using a case study of England's 'sub-culture war' of the 70s between Mods and Rockers. Cohen -and the scholars who have continued to develop his ideas such as Goode, Yehuda, Herdt and Critcher to name a few- contributed the definitive theoretical frame through which we can understand 'chav' women as contemporary folk devils.

Moral panics are summarised in the following words by Cohen:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerge to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion...

(Cohen; 1980; 9)

He conceptualised the Mods vs. Rockers moment as such a moral panic, and dedicated the book to uncovering the *processes* of this particular panic; the 'emergence' of the Mods and Rockers, the caricaturing of this group, the dissemination of the stereotype through the mass media, the seizing of the panic by moralists, and eventually the decision to take special measures and tighten societal controls. I frame 'Broken Britain' within Cohen's framework of moral panic in order to conceptualise 'chav' women as its folk devils.

Moral Panics

Recognising 'Broken Britain' as a moral panic is the first step towards conceptualising 'chav' women as its folk devils, from where it is possible to cast light on the underlying notions of gender and class that merge to bring it all into being. The characteristics of moral panic are briefly set out below, and I contend that –at the outset of research- 'Broken Britain' appears to fit this framework:

1. Troubled Times: Scholars working with the concept almost unanimously agree that moral panics arise in troubled times: times of perceived anxiety, crisis, breakdown, or rapid change (Herdt; 2009; 32; Jenkins; 1992; 7; Cohen; 1980; 3). Thus moral

panics do not spring into life from nowhere, they tap into some raw material, hitting a responsive nerve in the general public who -for one reason or other- sense that society is in flux or is under attack (Goode & Yehuda; 1994; 26). At the most basic level, then, moral panics can be understood as reactions to change, and often indicate that certain hegemonic institutions, belief systems, traditions, or values are somewhat in crisis (Young; 2009; 13; Critcher; 2005; 7). Thus the shape that a moral panic takes, the groups that it hones in on, simultaneously illuminates the *values and fears* of the given society. And whilst it is impossible to probe into what changes in Britain may have prompted this moment of national crisis within the confines of this thesis, it is very helpful to bear in mind that the moral panic lays bare the values and fears of a society; and thus the gendered and classed face of its 'chav' women folk devils is indicative of something deep-seated in the British psyche.

2. *The Elements of Panic*: Cohen charted the stages and process through which the Mods and Rockers panic emerged. Goode and Yehuda -amongst others- have continued to develop this, identifying four key elements that define a phenomenon as a moral panic: A *heightened level of concern* about a certain group and the consequences of their behaviour on society, *hostility* towards a group in which they are defined as a threat to society and its values, a certain level of *consensus* amongst the public that this threat is real, exaggeration about a groups' behaviour, and finally *volatility* in the sense that moral panics are not continuous, they rise and fall, often quite suddenly (Goode & Yehuda; 1994; 33).

The key element here is hostility; the intensification of malevolence towards the group that through a process of mass stigmatisation becomes that panic's folk devil (Young; 2009; 13). Once a panic emerges it is recognisable as a kind of fever, in which mainstream society becomes engulfed by a condition of heightened agitation, emotional righteousness, fear, and anxiety, all of which stir up a type of excitement and fervour in which fascination becomes almost enjoyable (Goode & Yehuda; 1994; 225). The distinct energy that is characteristic of moral panics makes them somewhat seductive events (Young; 2009; 4).

Yet it is important to stress that no moral panic suffuses an entire society, it is never be the case that *everyone* in society becomes obsessed by a specific 'deviant' group; differences in political leaning, class, ethnicity, age and so on are important in determining who gets 'whipped up' by the moral frenzy (Goode & Yehuda; 1994; 31). Some scholars have taken pains to empirically prove that a moral panic has taken

hold via opinion polls and qualitative research- yet it appears that classifying a phenomena as a moral panic remains somewhat objective.

Finally whilst moral panics are volatile by nature, appearing and disappearing often very quickly, there do exist *serial moral panics* which re-emerge periodically, for instance panics about paedophiles, drug addicts, or as I will argue, working-class women (Cricher; 2005; 12).

3. *The Role of the Media*: Cohen argued that the creation of folk devils relies on mythologies, stigma, and stereotypes which are heavily propagated by the mass media, whom he credits as playing the central role in the creation, and maintenance, of moral panics in general (Cohen; 1980; 16). Cohen argues that it is the media that continually draws out societal boundaries, informs and reminds the public of what is right and wrong, normal or abnormal- and that the media holds the power to generate diffuse feelings of concern, anxiety, indignation, or even full-blown panic (Cohen; 1980; 16-17). Subsequent scholars have continued to stress the role the media plays in fostering panics, whilst acknowledging that in today's multi-mediated world this role has shifted somewhat (Hall et al; 2005; 41; Herdt; 2009; 12). As the data in the following chapters reveals, the media has played a typically instrumental role in promulgating and shaping 'Broken Britain'.

4. *The Re-Affirmation of Societal Boundaries*: The majority of scholars working with the concept concur that moral panics inevitably function to reconfigure and delineate the normative contours, and moral boundaries, of a given society (Goode & Yehuda; 1994; 29; Cricher; 2005; 14; Lemmings; 2009; 2; Cohen; 1980; 10). Without entering into conspiracy theories, it appears that the very purpose of moral panics - their *raison d'être*- is to re-affirm what is right and wrong, and to draw the line at the diversity that society will tolerate. How this works is harder to pin down, yet this thesis will attempt to highlight the discursive practises that execute this societal control.

Thus the concept of moral panic captures a specific type of *societal phenomena*, I suggest at this point that the 'Broken Britain' discourse fits the above criteria, and can thus be understood as a moral panic- this is later tested and discussed against the data. Again it is well beyond the scope of this study to either empirically prove that this *is* a moral panic, or to attempt to uncover its causes or triggers. Instead, the focus is on how 'chav' women have been discursively produced as the folk devils of 'Broken Britain'. This narrower, more manageable, focus on a single element of Cohen's

theory does still -however- remain located in the broader theoretical framework of moral panic.

Folk Devils

Folk devils are the figures to which all of the negativity, anxieties, and fears of the moral panic become attached. They become the scapegoat to which all societal ills are attributed, their behaviour is understood as a threat to the most intrinsic of societal values and morals, and once they have been identified and vilified attempts commence to discipline them. Cohen argues that they become the "...visible reminders of what we should not be"; a moral line is drawn dichotomising 'us' from 'them' (Cohen; 1980; 10).

And once a group has been cast as folk devils they become easily visually identifiable, for instance the Mods and Rockers could be recognised by their fashion choices, as can 'chavs'. Deviance becomes associated with a certain *look*, and with a certain *type*:

Folk devils permit instant recognition; they are unambiguously unfavourable symbols, that is, stripped of all favourable characteristics and imparted with exclusively negative ones. In such a symbolisation process 'images are made sharper than reality'.

(Goode & Yehuda; 1994; 28)

And it is stereotyping that produces this univocally negative figure. Certain -real or perceived- characteristics, behaviours, and appearances associated with the target group are litanised and promulgated in order that a coherent and one-dimensional folk-devil may be formed. Once the folk devil has come into existence through this process, a relentless spotlight is placed upon it, and any infringement of societal norms and morals -no matter how slight- is seized upon (Allan; 2006; xiii). In the climate and fervour of a moral panic, the folk devil becomes the sole target of an outpouring of defensive, self-righteous hostility. Folk devils thus function as the symbolic ciphers of moral panic.

Interestingly, folk devils are often 'recycled'. The target 'deviant' group of panics past is dusted off and attacked with a renewed vigour (Goode & Yehuda; 1994; 72). This, I propose, has taken place with the contemporary folk devil of 'chav' women.

Whilst it is too neat to draw a simple correlation between the figure of the Victorian ‘Prostitute’ and today’s ‘chav’ woman, they undeniably share the same central characteristics, both embodying similar anxieties about class, morality, gender, and sexuality.

‘Chav’ women have become instantly recognisable and highly visible *types*, and can clearly be conceptualised as contemporary folk devils on account of their symbolic role in containing all that is ‘wrong’ in Britain today. Cohen’s point of departure –the transactional approach to deviance as developed by Howard Becker- is particularly significant in approaching the topic of ‘chav’ women. Because Becker, and subsequently Cohen, begin by problematising the very idea of deviance. They urge that we do not take for granted a societal imposition of the deviant label on *any* group; that instead we ask ‘deviant to whom?’, ‘deviant from what?’, ‘problematic to whom?’, ‘says who?’, and ‘why?’ (Cohen; 1980; 12; Becker; 1963). This emphasis on the suspension of common knowledge, on questioning common ideas of what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ encouraged by Cohen is very suited to discourse analysis, and is arguably the only way that the topic of ‘chav’ women can successfully be analysed.

Summary

In summary, then, this study frames ‘Broken Britain’ as a moral panic and ‘chav’ women as its folk devils. This builds on the historical frame set out in the first section, as many parallels can be drawn between the anxiety and fear-ridden epoch of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and today’s moral panic. Furthermore, in both periods working-class women have been cast as folk devils, symbolising all that is ‘wrong’ whilst simultaneously illuminating society’s inherent and chronic unease regarding class, morality, gender, and sexuality.

Summary to Chapter Two

The ‘chav’ woman’s historical genealogy can be traced back to the Victorian era through post-structuralist accounts of the period, the classist and symbolically violent underpinnings of her representation are revealed by drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, and finally the discursive figure of the ‘chav’ woman can be conceptualised as a folk devil using Stanley Cohen’s theorisation of moral panic.

Taken together, these three theoretical lenses constitute a frame from which the research can be realised. Whilst drawing from very varied academic sites and

disciplines, these theoretical threads come together to constitute a dynamic and revealing basis for the analysis set out in the following two chapters.

Chapter 3

“This abysmal woman is pretty much the poster girl for modern Britain”:

Sketching the Social Reality

The aim of this chapter is to present and analyse data that addresses sub-question 2 - *what is the social reality produced, and experienced as real, by discourses of ‘Broken Britain’ and ‘chav’ women-* and locate this reality within the theoretical frame set out in the previous chapter. Thus it is more descriptive, and the next chapter more analytical.

The first section begins by establishing what ‘Broken Britain’ *is* and how it is experienced. It first describes the social reality of ‘Broken Britain’ as the mass media and the moral entrepreneurs set it out, before examining how it is absorbed and reproduced amongst the public. The second section discusses the widely propagated causes for this national decline- the breakdown of the nuclear family, fatherlessness, and single mothers. After this the next section progresses to the subject of ‘Broken Britain’s’ folk devil- the ‘chav’ woman: her recognisable ‘look’ and the behaviour associated with such a look. The resistance to this social reality is then briefly discussed, before all of the discussed findings are linked to back to the theoretical in the concluding section.

‘Broken Britain’

It was the now-Prime Minister David Cameron who coined the term ‘Broken Britain’ in 2008, and has continued using it interchangeably with ‘Broken Society’ since. Amongst the many moral entrepreneurs under analysis here, it is David Cameron who emerges as the most zealous, never missing an opportunity to stress that Britain is “*weak*” and “*demoralised*” in a condition of “*slow-motion moral collapse*”. The vagueness of Cameron’s rhetoric, and the way it is utilised in relation to such a diverse range of occurrences and issues seems to suggest that he has put his finger on some untangeable and shape-shifting condition that has gripped the nation. The term was jumped upon by the mass media and a wider pool of moral entrepreneurs who use it in a similarly vague fashion. Despite the ambiguity of the term, the data appears to suggest that ‘Broken Britain’ is in fact best summarised as a *social recession*. The

basic idea is that the nation has become socially bankrupt, particularly in the realm of morality. The media speak of “*the erosion of moral standards*”, and a “*lost moral code*” that once bound the nation together- Britain is painted as a state experiencing a moral crisis alongside its financial one. Aside from morality, Britain is presented as having either lost or destroyed other basic societal values: respect, manners, aspiration, pride, and compassion. The media use terms like “*walk-on by society*” or “*it’s my right society*” to conjure an image of an atomised society that has fundamentally lost its culture and most basic standards.

The whole notion of ‘Broken Britain’, however, remains hazy until we identify the concrete events and incidents to which it is attached. The array and scope of these is quite incredible, stretching from the ridiculous or mundane across to the severest of crimes. Essentially, ‘Broken Britain’ encompasses anything. The more trivial examples include the numbers of people who are overweight, wearing casual clothing such as tracksuits or pyjamas during the day, and whose homes and gardens are not tended to satisfactorily. This list goes on to include bad manners, truancy, disruptive behaviour in schools, vandalism, and casual intimidation. A crucial indicator of ‘Broken Britain’ is held to be the growth of ‘broken homes’ headed by single mothers claiming financial support from the state- more of which later. The more acute evidence of the ‘Broken Society’ includes theft, thuggery and violent crime, young offenders, over-stretched prisons, drunkenness, drug-addiction, self-harm, child abuse and infanticide, murders, and riots.

The mass media thus choose to report *almost anything* as proof of Britain’s ‘broken’ condition. The tone with which this is executed veers between one of generalised doom and one of acute panic. Examples of the more defeatist voices speak of “*a nation in decline*”, “*optimism laying in tatters*”, a “*sad reality*” and a “*national tragedy*”. The more panic inducing and hysterical voices in the mass media describe “*the horrifying picture of the extent of Broken Britain*”, “*a descent into an age of barbarism*”, “*a land where there is no respect for the law, or even human life*” all the time urging that time is running out to fix it, and to “*save*” the nation.

Many researchers concerned with discourse, or with moral panic, analyse newspaper articles alone to gauge what the social reality of a certain discourse is. However, by incorporating the very contemporary data of reader’s comments in response to articles we can build a more robust and well-rounded picture of the social reality under study. What the reader’s comments reveal in this case is that the discourse of ‘Broken

Britain' -peddled by the mass media and by moral entrepreneurs- has reverberated amongst the public, who recognise it as something real, visible, and present in their daily lives.

The extent to which this discourse has filtered from the media to the public can be seen by reader's use of the idiom 'Broken Britain' itself, even in response to articles that have not mentioned it, nor spoke of social or moral decline. Examples include "*Broken Britain indeed, the UK is a disgrace to humanity*" and "*something has gone very badly wrong in Broken Britain*"- both in response to a brief and factual article about a supermarket banning its customers from wearing pyjamas in-store. What are also common in the results are reader's own versions of the 'Broken Britain' saying, for instance "*rotten Britain*", "*unGreat Britain*" and "*Third World Britain*".

And the readers too -like the media- appear to resort to disillusioned and cynical comments, or to frenzied and hysterical ones. Those who appear more dejected about the perceived state of the nation speak of their shame and embarrassment regarding contemporary Britain, often comparing it nostalgically to a once-great country that is no longer. These comments are also pervaded with a sense of resignation, as though the damage to Britain is irreversible. Countless comments along the lines of "*this country is finished*" and "*this country is lost*" are interspersed with more vocal ones for instance "*a sad end to a country I was proud to be from*". Those who appear not yet to have reached such a state of disappointment and futility are more panic-prone. These comments suggest a high-speed downward spiral that is gathering momentum, and warn fervently that the nation is reaching a point of no return, for example "*this has to stop NOW!!!! if we are to avoid falling into the abyss!!*". Some comments go further with language of monsters, dark forces at work, and a descent into hell.

Thus what the data suggests is that the 'Broken Britain' discourse sets out a social reality in which Britain is in decline due to lost or destroyed societal values, and that this explains virtually anything unsatisfactory that takes place in the contemporary period. The results show that this discourse has either inspired the public to recognise such a reality, or has tapped into a pre-existent discontentment and disillusionment- putting a name to the reader's malaise regarding the world around them.

The Other Britain

Another -very significant- layer of results from the data suggest that the media's 'Broken Britain' is not in fact a nation wide condition, rather, it is only *particular pockets* of the nation that are not only 'broken' but "*sick*". The message is that certain parts of the country have become 'moral deserts', dark and foreign places in which people are living outside the normal rules of society, and consciously rejecting its core values. In the words of the *Daily Mail*:

This is an England few of us have visited and even fewer would want to: it's in our midst but entirely hidden from view. Worse, it has been left to fester like an unseen cancer for decades.

The social reality that this discourse creates is one in which parts of Britain, or segments of its society, have been utterly corrupted. These places and their people are painted as 'Others', as alien in every aspect of their being. And the 'Broken Britain' rhetoric suggests that these places and people are multiplying, seemingly encroaching on the 'good' Britain, and poisoning society from within. Discourse thus divides the public into 'us' and 'them'. And suggests that a tipping in the balance between these groupings has occurred -or is occurring- thus the nation is at breaking point, or has already 'broken'. The language used to conjure such a reality often invokes a kind of colonial anthropology; speaking of aliens, 'Others', dark and dangerous places to which we have pulled back the curtains and snatched a glimpse.

Again we can see that the reader's comments reinforce an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. The disillusionment, anger, panic, and blame for 'Broken Britain' is directed at those people -an entirely different 'kind' of people- who are deemed the cause of the nation's decline. Countless instances of commentators referring to 'them' or 'these people' occur throughout the data, for instance "*I know how these people live, how they think, how they act and how they justify their pointless lives and it is just too depressing*".

In summary, through the analyses of these diverse data sources 'Broken Britain' emerges not as a nation-wide loss of societal values, but as one located specifically amongst a certain 'type'. These people are painted as progressively encroaching on wider society, destroying its core values and standards, and thus placing a pressure on

the nation that is evidenced in anything from obesity to violent crime, or from messy homes to murder.

Gendering 'Broken Britain': The Causes

The last step towards establishing the social reality of 'Broken Britain' is to identify what the causes of this crisis are promulgated to be. It is also here that the gendered nature of 'Broken Britain' becomes visible. It appears there are three noteworthy causes -all hybridly intertwined- the breakdown of the family, fatherlessness, and single mothers. All of these flag up obvious gender connotations, placing a disproportionate emphasis on women, and are the first step towards identifying the ultimate folk devil in 'Broken Britain': the chav woman.

The moral entrepreneurs -namely David Cameron and his most vocal sidekick Iain Duncan Smith- have been consistent in identifying the central causal factor in Britain's breakdown: the breakdown of the nuclear family. Duncan Smith warns, "*at the heart of so much social breakdown sits the collapse of a forgotten institution, that institution is the family, and it is absolutely fundamental to a stable society*". Thus they argue that the nation is finally experiencing the consequences of the cornerstone of marriage having been replaced by a "*libertine free-for-all*" the results of which have been "*disastrous*". The unswerving message is resoundingly clear: traditional nuclear family is fast being outnumbered by the "*wrong kind of family*".

Continuing further in this vein, David Cameron and his aides coined the term 'fatherlessness': the condition of being raised without a father. And by proxy being raised by a single mother. The moral entrepreneurs speak of 'fatherlessness' as a sort of condition inherited at birth, for instance "*the majority of rioters were fatherless a study has found*" or when speaking of "*the destructive behaviour associated with fatherlessness*". 'Fatherlessness' is presented as an unfortunate and debilitating condition with which one is born, which can be diagnosed based on a lack of a male role model to instil the key values of discipline and respect, as well as a work ethic. What is fascinating about the use of the term fatherlessness is that it does not point the finger of blame at those absent males; rather the blame is left lingering for the mass media and the public to deliver. This condemnation -rather unsurprisingly- becomes attached to the single mother. And so via talk of fatherlessness, a picture is painted of the 'wrong kind of family': those headed by single mothers. The public are warned that "*the children of single mothers do worse, often much worse, than the children of*

married couples”, that in the void left by fathers it seems a generation is being “*dragged up*” in households characterised by “*emotional chaos and physical and moral squalor*” and are not being instilled with any social skills, any core societal values, or any aspirations and ambitions. The mass media go further to accuse single mothers of treating their children like “*meal tickets*” or “*cash cows*”, suggesting that they are a means of obtaining increased governmental financial support. And once again the data suggests that this rhetoric of broken homes, fatherlessness, and single mothers appears to be reinforced by the public, for instance this reader’s comment in response to a *Daily Telegraph* article about a jobless mother of eleven children:

I’ve always believed these dreadful people should be sterilised for their own good, what are they contributing to society by continuing to bring fatherless children into the world? Yet another generation with the same lack of ambition, work ethic and morals....

As this comment suggests the social breakdown caused by single mothers inadequately socialising their children is understood as generational. The current crisis that Britain is presented as facing is attributed to the coming-of-age of the second generation of those dysfunctionally raised by single mothers. The mass media warn of an irresponsible, unsocialised, and amoral generation “*coming home to roost*”, that every child born to a single mother is adding to a “*ever-expanding matrix of dysfunction*”, and that it is this cycle of single-motherhood that has the nation on its knees. And again this discourse is reproduced by the public, an example would be “*what appalling values these revolting women must be teaching their children, I despair for humanity*” in response to an article about a fight amongst mothers at a primary school.

Furthermore the results show that the language of fatherlessness, and the finger of blame that is pointed -directly or indirectly- at the single mother for Broken Britain, appears to have created a platform in which male (and a small handful of female) commentators may impassionedly and freely express their scorn regarding women’s rights, feminism, any left-leaning ideological beliefs, and in many cases of women altogether. Men complain that they have been violated, emasculated, stripped of their roles as fathers and undermined as breadwinners.

Folk Devil: The Chav Woman

The last section outlined the causes for 'Broken Britain' which together paint a picture in which the sorry state of the nation is to be attributed to women, mothers in particular. However, this section will show that it is a very specific 'type' of woman and mother who is blamed, and who is understood simultaneously as the *cause and the product* of 'Broken Britain': the 'chav' woman. The media and the moral entrepreneurs lay the blame on these 'types' of women by either explicitly blaming them, for instance "*BROKEN Britain is defined by too many people like Lisa*" or by suggesting that they symbolise 'Broken Britain' with sentences such as "*a decline that this unfortunate woman seems to embody*". This notion that 'chav' women are at once the cause *and* product of 'Broken Britain' is resoundingly echoed by the public who with consistent regularity comment "*this THING is why Britain is on its knees-vile!*" or "*this abysmal woman is pretty much the poster girl for modern Britain*" to share two examples. But before going further in theoretically framing the 'chav' woman as a folk devil it is first necessary to describe this recognisable 'type' of woman within this social reality.

The first step towards doing so is to recognise that in this discursively produced social reality this 'type' of woman is not always referred to as a 'chav'. Whilst the title 'chav' is very common, equally common is 'benefit mum', 'baby machine', 'benefit breeder', 'monster mum', 'benefit queen', 'entitlement queen' and 'chav queen' (the word benefit(s) refers to any financial or material aid from the government). In the public's comments other reoccurring names include 'feral trash', 'parasite', 'worthless woman', 'troglodyte', 'filthy trog', 'skank', 'scrubber' and 'sket' (sket and scrubber meaning roughly the same as skank). However for the sake of consistency and clarity -and to maintain the class focus- this paper continues referring to this 'type' of women as 'chav' women.

In many instances these women are not named at all, instead their 'type' is recognised through their perceived appearance, behaviour, and sexuality. Within this social reality 'chav' women are recognised as unattractive across almost every axis. They are perceived as hard-faced women, devoid of feminine traits, who look far older than their age. They are recognised as having hard, greasy, or spotty faces- and almost always deemed 'ugly'. Their bodies are also understood to be overweight or obese and there are countless references to 'double chins' and 'triple bellies'. Their clothes too are a signifier of what 'type' they are; they are associated with tracksuits,

pyjamas, and garish gold jewellery as well as with dirty, unwashed, and scruffy clothes in general. The fact that 'chav' women are recognisable 'types' is evidenced within countless comments from the public, for example "*why do they always look the same..maybe a different breed?????*", "*she has a hard nasty face! I am not surprised!*" and finally "*the look on her face and her un-brushed hair tells you all! SCUMBAG!*". This suggests a coherent image attached to this certain 'type' of troubling woman.

A comment like "*looks exactly what she is*" confirms this highly recognisable appearance, whilst simultaneously alluding to these women's perceived behaviour. 'Chav' women are held to lead lives defined by a lack of self-discipline, hard work, and routine. Their 'bad habits' include drinking excessively, smoking cannabis and cigarettes, and eating a diet of junk food, frozen food, and especially *McDonalds*. What the media frequently refer to as a "*booze and fags lifestyle*" (meaning an alcohol and cigarette lifestyle). Their laziness is seemingly confirmed by their overweight bodies, but also by their dirty clothes, smelly bodies, messy homes, and unkept gardens. 'Chav' women are also known for their violent and anti-social behaviour, being prone to public outbursts and threatening behaviour.

This 'bad behaviour' extends through the 'chav' woman's sexuality. 'Chav' women are worryingly promiscuous, 'sex-mad', often alluded to as "slags" and "slappers" by the public (both names meaning the same as slut). Furthermore, their sexuality is deemed *abnormal*: watching porn, taking part in threesomes, going 'dogging' (a practise in which strangers watch and are watched having sex in cars), committing incest, and living in close proximity to paedophiles and sex offenders. Within this realm of sexuality they are also understood as being shockingly over-fertile, and procreation is what often seems to draw the greatest outpourings of negativity from the media and public. They are consistently berated for "*churning*" and "*spurting*" out large numbers of children, of whom they "*lose count*". The public often make comments along the lines that "*they are all out breeding decent people six to one*".

There is also evidence that 'chav' women are fetishised on account of their appearance deviant sexuality. Firstly there are the tens of thousands of pages and links for 'chav' porn, which by and large present a 'chav' woman -who matches the description set out here so far- taking part in all the practises generally found in hard-core pornography. Comments and forums indicate an obsession with these women's bodies, often giving highly-detailed and seemingly disgusted descriptions like "*bras 3*

cups too small peeping out of fat oozing boob tubes” or “blubbery thighs see-sawing to the ankle”. There are also those men who explicitly state their attraction for these types of women saying simply *“she is kind of cute”* or *“these sorts of girls make me wild”*.

Finally what must be included is how ‘chav’ women are described and recognised in animalistic terms. This is one of the strongest trends that emerged in the data -though the media do not appear to participate- and it was those comments that *did not* use animalistic language that stood out as exceptional. Their sexual practises are described as depraved and bestial, and their reproduction is *consistently* referred to as ‘breeding’, implying a lack of humanity and maternalism. They are often described as feral, wild, and snarling beasts And the sub-human nature of ‘chav’ women in this social world emerges continuously in comments that refer to them as dogs, or as *“lazy mares”*, *“filthy swines”*, *“stupid sows”*, or as a *“filthy unwashed cow”* and *“sewer rat”*. This comment exemplifies such discursive practise:

What an ugly young woman. With a face like a rat...and a feral attitude...And to think...she has children...more little rats like her, to plague England. We need a rat catcher!

One final finding, which was quite unforeseen in comparison to those discussed above, is that of race. The ‘chav’ women are recognised as being bigoted and racist, whilst at the same time understood to be engaging in sex with black and Asian men and bearing mixed-race children. There are many frequent stories in the mainstream media about this ‘type’ of woman participating in racist attacks or launching into xenophobic outburst in public places. At the same time the majority of ‘chav’ porn presents a white women engaging in sex with black and Asian men, and they are often ridiculed in reader’s comments with contributions like *“bet her kids have got amazing names, bet they are all different colours too”*. This paradox of ‘chav’ woman as simultaneously guilty of racism and of ‘cross-breeding’, is interestingly upheld as a *further* indicator of her lack of self-control and morals.

Resistance

This chapter has so far set out the discursively produced social reality of ‘Broken Britain’ and ‘chav’ women. It has done so by drawing together the most recurrent

findings and trends. However this is not to suggest that this social reality -experienced as real and solid- is completely inclusive and shared by all of society as a coherent whole. There is of course resistance to, and criticism of, this *version* of social reality. Whilst constituting a small minority there were voices -within the mass media and the wider public -that criticised the rhetoric of 'Broken Britain'. Additionally there were voices of resistance that named the misogyny and classism inherent in all of the above, and opposed what they recognise as the witch-hunt through which 'chav' women are being scapegoated for all that is 'wrong' today. These individuals expressed their resentment, boredom, and frustration with this prejudiced, reactionary, and distorting version of reality. And called for an alternative one that reveals the unequal class and gender power relations at play.

Locating this Social Reality in Theory

The data suggests that 'Broken Britain' can indeed be understood as a moral panic in Stanley Cohen's framework. These following renowned words –explaining what moral panic is- seem exceptionally apt:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerge to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion...

(Cohen; 1980; 9)

Following Cohen's work the various stages of a moral panic can be clearly identified in 'Broken Britain'; first a *heightened level of concern* about a group, in this case single mothers and dysfunctional families, secondly the definition of this group as a *threat* to society and its values, and thirdly the *public recognition* of this threat as actual and menacing. The case can be made that Britain has reached this stage -public recognition- because of the reader's comments that were analysed and cited. The role of the media and of the moral entrepreneurs also supports Cohen's arguments that it is they who stoke the early flames of moral panic, and are able to ignite the notion that 'something is wrong', fuelling sentiments of anxiety, alarm, resentment and also of total panic. However the results also indicate that 'Broken Britain' is not an archetypal moral panic, namely because of its lack of *volatility*. Theorists argue that moral panics typically begin and end quickly, and that their brief spell is marked by a

kind of national fervour that quickly abates. Yet the emphasis on 'Broken Britain' as a festering generational crisis that has only recently come into sight, and the fact the rhetoric of this panic has spanned five years already suggests it is a moral panic of a different nature. The tendency for gloom, dejection, and defeatism that has seemingly become a central element in British discourse suggests a kind of prolonged and slow motion moral panic, which is hovering over the UK rather than engulfing it.

Where it is evident that Cohen's framework is a powerful fit is that the 'chav' woman is 'Broken Britain's' folk devil. They constitute the group that have become attached to -and come to symbolise all that is wrong with- society, whose very existence is detrimental to the nation and its values. They are simultaneously the *cause* of Broken Britain in their role as irresponsible single mothers, but also, they *symbolise* decline and all that is negative in Britain. Aggressive typecasting and stereotyping by the media and moral entrepreneurs is necessary in order to produce a coherent and highly visible folk devil that can act as such a symbolic cipher (Cohen; 1980). And this can be seen in the one-dimensional figure of the 'chav' woman -her appearance, behaviour, and sexuality- which is recognised with an apparently nation wide common-recognition.

In another vein, the parallels between the 'chav' woman and the Victorian working class woman are illuminating, whilst a certain amount of likeness was expected, the extent of the resemblance was quite bewildering. The 'chav' woman, like her historical counterpart, is deemed immoral, undisciplined, promiscuous, over fertile yet unfeminine, and linked to all that is tawdry, dirty, and troubling. And her role as 'bad mother' the 'chav' woman is similarly dehumanised through the denial of her capacity for love and other emotions. Both are brought to life with imagery of bestiality and savagery, and all the above is manifested in a physical appearance that is loaded with meaning. And like this Victorian predecessor the 'chav' woman has somehow become a signifier for Britain: an indication of the condition of the nation. Thus I argue that the 'chav' woman is a recycled folk devil, and thus that 'Broken Britain' should be understood as an example of a *serial* moral panic. What this suggests about sustained notions of gender and class will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

The Forces of Creation, and What They Tell Us About Gender and Class

This chapter focuses on those data results that allow us to see *how* the social reality created in the previous chapter is produced. The first section consists of these results split into two broad discursive practises -within which a multitude of other more intricate discursive practises take place- the first is *flares in the media* and the second is the bringing into play of the class-based *habitus* as set out by Bourdieu. The second section of this chapter discusses what everything so far indicates about underlying notions of gender and class. The sub-question that guides this chapter is: *what discursive practises produce this social reality, and what do they suggest about underlying notions of gender and class?*

The Flares of 'Broken Britain'

The first major way in which we can identify the construction, and maintenance, of the social reality set out in the previous chapter is recognising the significance of *flare* news events. I call them flares as they are intermittent bursts of panic and hysteria about 'Broken Britain' that punctuate the more sustained doom characteristic of this moral panic. The mass media and the moral entrepreneurs present certain incidents as evidence of 'Broken Britain', and the ways in which this is executed and the consequences of such utilisation are deeply illuminating in terms of both gender and class.

The coverage of four case studies was analysed. What all the cases hold in common is that they were promulgated as proof of 'Broken Britain', and in each case 'chav' women became deeply implicated. The first is the case of Baby P, a young infant who was tortured to death by his stepfather and this man's brother, whose mother Tracey Connelly did not intervene or put a stop to the abuse. The second example is the disappearance of Shannon Matthews; an eight-year-old girl who it emerged had been kidnapped by a male relative, known to her mother -Karen Matthews- who collaborated with him on the plot in the hope of obtaining the reward money. The third example is the very recent case of six children dying in a house fire, it transpired that their father -Mick Philpott- had deliberately ignited the blaze in the hope of

obtaining a larger council home, whilst his plan had been to rescue the children he was unable to do so as the fire got out of control. And the final case study is the riots of 2011, in which thousands of young people took to the streets across England and looted city centres. I chose to include the case of the riots as it is a powerful example of how blame is re-routed to 'chav' women even in those cases that are completely removed from the familial -or traditionally feminine- sphere.

And so what is striking about each of these cases, and what they have in common, is how women -'chav' women- are blamed regardless of the extent of their involvement. The most powerful example is Tracey Connelly- in each article she is named as the principal killer implicated in Baby P's death with the name of his *actual* killers often not appearing at all, it was *her* picture that stared out from front pages with headlines such as "*MOTHER OF EVIL*", and the outpour of hatred and condemnation was unlike anything that had preceded it. The extent to which she was impugned for Baby P's death was such that it came as a shock to me when analysing the data that she *was not*, in fact, his killer. Likewise with Karen Matthews, who was painted as the lone culprit in her daughter's disappearance, the name of her actual kidnapper receiving very little notice. The media's condemnation of both these women for the crimes of others, or crimes committed in collaboration with others, was by and large extremely successful. The same was attempted in the case of the house blaze, many journalists and politicians attempted to steer the blame towards Mairead Philpott -Mick's wife and mother of the children who died- who may have known of the plot. An article in *The Daily Mail* ran under the headline "*YES MICK'S A MONSTER- BUT IT'S HIS WIFE'S ROLE THAT'S MORE SHOCKING*", the article detailed Mairead's sexual practises, criticised her appearance, and deplored her parenting skills. Despite the media's efforts though, the spotlight in this case remained predominantly on Mick. The final case of the riots is perhaps the most incredulous example of women being blamed within the climate of a flare. Though 90% of rioters were male (The Guardian; 2011), it was a generalised mass of single mothers who were ultimately identified and attacked by the media and moral entrepreneurs- for their perceived failure to adequately raise their children. So we can observe a recurrent tendency to report incidents in such a fashion that the blame is steered towards a woman -and normally away from a man or men- even in the most unlikely of circumstances.

By recognising that the blame is being placed undeviatingly on 'chav' women in cases that are deemed symbolic of 'Broken Britain' we can begin to develop a strong

understanding of how they have become contemporary folk devils. And the mass media and moral entrepreneurs do not attempt any subtlety in casting this ‘type’ of woman as ‘Broken Britain’s’ folk devil. Within the fervour of a flare they do so antagonistically and unambiguously. The three aforementioned women and the unnamed ‘mass’ of single mothers are referred to as “*emblematic*” of a kind of societal breakdown, a loss of values, and the erosion of a mutually agreed upon cultural code. This *Daily Mail* headline encapsulates the shamelessness with which this typecasting is executed:

Seven children, six fathers (and a ring from Argos): Lazy, sex-mad Karen Matthews symbolises Broken Britain

(Argos is a budget chain store that is known for cheap gold jewellery). In this quote it is evident how all of the characteristics discussed in the previous chapter are called upon to build a coherent ‘type’ to which all that is wrong in the nation can become attached. Another example from the ever-aggressive *Daily Mail*:

Consider that brutal, filthy, feckless woman Karen Matthews, churning out seven children by six fathers... Consider the couldn't-care-less mother of Baby P, who allowed her child to be tortured to death for the gratification of a sub-human yob with whom she happened to be sleeping... the personification of that terrifying growing phenomenon: a feckless, amoral, workshy, benefit-dependent underclass.

This extract illustrates how the above flare events, and the women at their epicentre, become bundled together to build an image of a generic folk devil -the ‘chav woman’ with all her characteristics- and mobilised to generate hostility, blame, and panic. These women and their alleged offences are seized upon and they are thrown into the “*the pantheon of female monsters*” in the most highly publicised way imaginable.

It may already be clear to the reader from these quotes that within the climate of these flares what would at other times be deemed offensive, unsayable, or non-politically correct becomes acceptable. The flares mark periods in which the media and the moral entrepreneurs can ‘let rip’, wholeheartedly vocalising their disdain for ‘chav’ women- and unequivocally charging them with ruining the nation. A strong example of this amongst moral entrepreneurs is the Conservative councillor John

Ward using Karen Matthews to illustrate the idea of ‘Broken Britain’, while calling for the compulsory sterilisation of everyone claiming government support. Another example is the Conservative Iain Duncan Smith expressing relief that he can “*stop being neutral about what kind of families are best for the country*”. Thus the flares create a sort of ‘safe space’ emancipating these parties who can momentarily disseminate *their* version of social reality -and the version they want the public to share- in an aggressive and univocal fashion. The agitation and fervour these flares create also offer politicians a unique opportunity to take morally draconian actions- the most extreme example of which came in retaliation to the riots. David Cameron announced that 120,000 single parent households were to be put through a ‘family intervention program’, that over one million families were to be stripped of their benefits, and finally that many of the families of rioters were to be evicted from their homes.

In summary, one of the most aggressive discursive techniques employed -to create the social reality set out in chapter three- is to turn incidents into *flares* using the language of ‘Broken Britain’. Once a flare has gripped the nation, the ‘chav’ woman be violently typecast as the nation’s folk devils, and the mass media and moral entrepreneurs adopt a no-holds-barred approach in the blame and condemnation they attach to this ‘type’ of woman. The nature of governmental action following such flares leaves little doubt in the public’s minds as to what the causes are for social breakdown, and who is to blame.

Appealing to the Class Habitus

The second critical and over-arching way that this social reality is produced and maintained is through the appeal to the *habitus*, as conceived by Pierre Bourdieu. The discursive techniques that mobilise the habitus come together to form the long-term base from which the social reality under study is maintained, the flares then punctuating and powerfully reinforcing it.

The concept of the habitus is one of Bourdieu’s most powerful theoretical contributions and is key to recognising the classist nature of contemporary Britain’s discursively constructed social reality. To summarise again, the habitus refers to a system within which the different classes share a distinct experience and position that produces unified practises and lifestyles, as well as unified opinions towards the other classes- thus we can talk to an extent about a middle class or working class way of life

and/or worldview (Bourdieu; 1987; 5). This habitus is congenital, people have an instinctive and innate sense of the class-based differences between themselves and others, thus Bourdieu terms it the ‘class unconscious’ encapsulating the obliviousness with which it is enacted and reinforced (Bourdieu; 1985; 278). This section draws on the data to explain first how the media appeals to the public’s habitus, and then secondly how this appeal is recognised and reacted to by the public- indicating it’s success.

The first -most transparent- way the mass media and moral entrepreneurs appeal to the public’s habitus is by adopting an ‘us and them’ tone in which they explicitly *assume* that the reader is one of ‘us’. For instance by describing the Other Britain that “*most of us in society’s comfortable middle rarely see*” that is “*rather like a natural history program or a trip to the zoo*”- we can see a weighted presumption that the reader shares this sense of foreignness, and therefore shares the journalist’s lifestyle and worldview- in short their habitus. Class -or any notion of class- is often left out in favour of the more subtle cultivation of the habitus, for instance David Cameron speaks of cracking-down on “*the one’s everybody knows and avoids*”. He is tapping into a common and deeply engrained *recognition of difference*, and whilst any mention of class is left out, by following Bourdieu we can frame this recognition of difference as being produced from the class hierarchy.

When the media and politicians do not adopt the above technique of assuming that the reader shares their position in the ‘us and them’ dichotomy, they nonetheless ensure that the public recognises that the subject belongs to the unacceptable, undesirable, and troubling ‘them’ camp via their selection and delivery of information. Consistent in the data results was the insertion of *indicators* or *loaded information* at the start of an article -often in the opening or second sentence- which signal to the reader from the outset the ‘type’ -or class- of person in question. Typical examples of this technique within the ‘chav’ woman discourse would be “*Karen- who has seven children by five fathers- appealed for information...*” or “*jobless mother of four screamed racist abuse*”. These kinds of opening sentences tend to be followed by mentions of the woman’s weight, appearance, sexual practises, and daily routine. Another revealing way in which the media appeal to the reader’s habitus is through humour and sarcasm. The ‘chav’ women are mocked either explicitly or discreetly across the predictable axis of their appearance, sexuality, and lifestyle. For instance the Daily Mail write “*typical of the residents is Hayley, who at 21 has five children by*

three fathers, that's some going even for Westcliff" in an article that can best be summarised as an ethnography of a poor area for the benefit of middle class readers. In the same article, while detailing a tangled web of relationships which is suggested to veer towards incest, the journalists jokes "*I know its hard, Madam, but try to keep up at the back!*". A sadder example that shows the media's inability to refrain from callous snobbery is an article about Karen Matthews's attempts to leave her abusive relationship, the journalist unnecessarily includes that she had "*packed a plastic bag of clothes*", presumably so the reader's can giggle at the idea of a woman with so little class or style. This mockery often thrives on an appeal to middle class notions of taste -and within Bourdieu's conceptualisation of class taste is paramount- the clothes and jewellery worn by 'chav' women are noted, their diets and vices poked fun at, all of which inspires a collective, uniting and gratifying laugh from the middle class.

A final attempt -or trump card- that the media employ to engage the habitus is the use of photographs. Photos such as Picture A will often accompany articles about 'Broken Britain', or about benefit recipients that in fact make no gendered references. This article discussed the replacement of cash benefits with food stamps, in order that the poor will stop spending money recklessly on alcohol, cigarettes, or junk food. By using an image of a lone young-looking woman, typically dressed within the 'chav' paradigm and accompanied by an infant, the largely factual article becomes gendered and symbolic of a *feminised* problem.

Picture A



In a similar vein the media often run stories about deviant women, and whilst the articles are very factual and do not adopt a judgmental or condemnatory tone and do not engage discursively with the ‘chav’ discourse, an image will be included (for example Picture B) that ensures the reader will recognise the ‘type’ of woman in question.



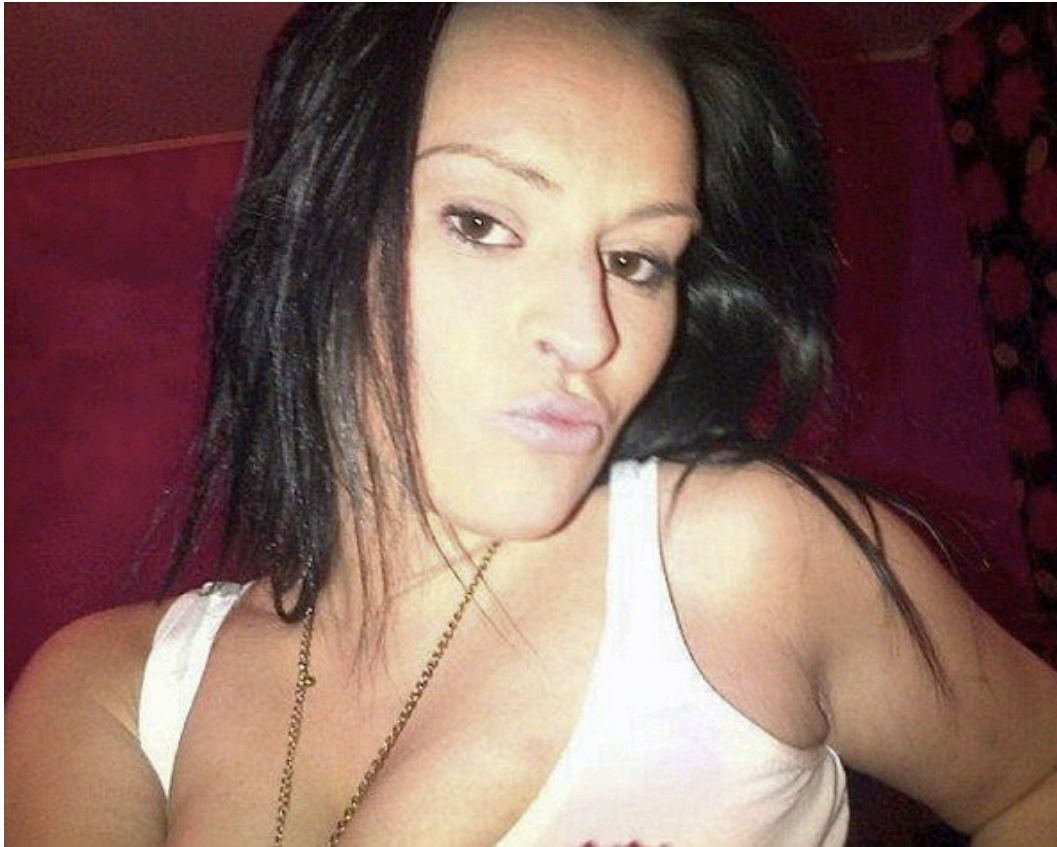
Picture B

The articles that make heaviest use of images are those that are most trivial -about petty disturbances, noisy neighbours, or poor fashion choices- perhaps to indicate the

significance of such articles to the reader. Examples of this are Picture C and Picture D, it seems that the use of images *visually links* what may otherwise have been dismissed as irrelevant to the wider exigent social reality of 'Broken Britain' and its classed and gendered folk devil.



Picture C

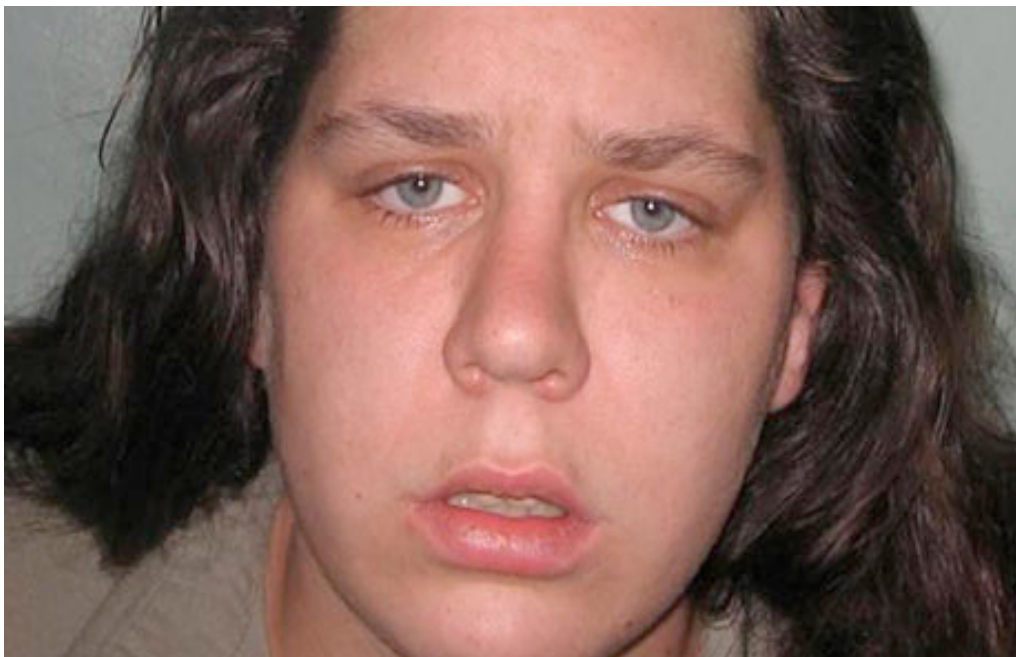


Picture D

And it is evident that through the use of images in the more sustained and low-key coverage of ‘chav’ women, in partnership with the images disseminated throughout the flares, that the media is visually bundling a ‘type’ of women together. They are establishing ocular connections between the female villains at the epicentre of the most shocking flare stories such as Karen Matthews (Picture E) and Tracey Connelly (Picture F) and those women implicated in the pettier of stories. So by analysing these images –and the *use* of these images- we can understand how the ‘chav’ woman has become so visually recognisable on the basis of her appearance within this discursively constructed social reality- as set out in chapter three.



Picture E: Karen Matthews



Picture F: Tracey Connelly

The Daily Mail goes further via their use of captions that leave no doubt that the image portrays a folk devil, and that this woman should be recognised as such. This normally entails an adjective like ‘evil’, ‘twisted’, ‘sick’, or ‘dangerous’, followed by a semi colon and a brief statement. For instance a photograph of Tracey Connelly is captioned “*Twisted: Tracey Connelly has shown no trace of remorse for Peter in self-pitying letters*”, one in a slightly differing style reads “*Symptom of a Broken Society: Karen Matthews*”. The definitive use of such loaded adjectives and the explicit referencing of ‘Broken Britain’ zealously code these women as pariahs.

At this point the focus turns to examine *how* the public responds to this invocation of the habitus. And the response is a powerful one; the public appear to pick-up on and respond to the cues and nudges -subtle or glaringly obvious- from the media and moral entrepreneurs. This I argue is the final and perhaps most crucial discursive practise in the solidification of this social reality.

The first aspect of the public response that is notable is that ‘class is everywhere’. Whilst actual mentions of class, socio-economic status, stratification, or poverty are essentially non-existent among the voices of the media and the moral entrepreneurs, the results show that the subtle mobilisation of the habitus taps into the still-deeply entrenched ‘class unconscious’ that Bourdieu puts his finger on. The public rarely refer to these women as working-class, instead they call them “*scum*”, “*dregs*”, “*the trash*”, “*the underclass*”, and “*chavs*”. Thus we can see the traditional language of class has been replaced by a contemporary one, which nonetheless continues to express all of the hierarchy, snobbery, prejudice, and fear contained within the class system. Articles are often followed by the briefest of comments- “*under-class alert!*”, “*CHAV*”, or “*chav Britain, enough said*”- which indicates a need to vocalise the class-based differences that the media only alludes to or hints at. The public pick up on the clues or indicators that the media gives them, and as well as this they spot established indicators of the class of the women in question, for example their names. One comment reads “*Carlene, Jolene, Sharon...pretty much tells you all you need to know about these low-lives*” and was accompanied by dozens like it, all of which display a recognition of the above names as working-class or ‘chav’ names. Thus we can see that despite the invisibility of class -it is not formally recognised or vocalised- the traditional markers of difference remain entrenched and continue to be recognisable. Also typical within the data are comments that seek to fill in the blanks of that which has been left unsaid through the utilisation of class-based stereotypes, for example “*let me guess...they are unemployed?*” or “*what’s the betting both these pond life are on benefits, pure scum*”.

This kind of stereotyping is often explicitly gendered, and we can see that the appeal to the habitus not only inspires class-based prejudice but also sexism- the two intertwine and overlap to produce the intersectional ‘chav’ woman. Just as the concept of the habitus taps into a common-sense world of difference, it appear that there exists a common sense world of sexism and gender-based difference too, and the media and politicians’ *gendered appeal to the habitus* appears very successful in bringing all of

these prejudices to the surface. The public recognise the ‘type’ of women who are being bundled together as folk devils, and this typification relies on the class-based habitus. Evidence of this can be found in comments like this one, which speaks directly to the woman in question:

...as soon as I saw your pictures I knew EXACTLY the sort of person you are: thick, common, vulgar, cheap, trashy, without morals or scruples, as dim as glow worm’s armpit and a burden on society.

As this comment suggests the visual discursive practises involved in the use of photographs is powerfully effective. Examples like “*the face tells it all*”, or “*a picture tells a thousand words*” and “*she has a hard nasty face! I’m not surprised!*” are evidence that this particular technique -and the wider multi-dimensional appeal to the class habitus- is worryingly successful. So we can see that the public recognise this ‘type’ and are mobilised together in hostility towards ‘chav’ women, and that this is arguably what makes the social reality under study so robust.

But what is indicative is not only that the public recognise ‘chav’ women and conceptualise them as folk devils, but how they respond to them, and the emotions and behaviours that this ‘type’ of woman inspire. Firstly, we can see a tendency to laugh at these women, to mock and ridicule them in a snobbish style that echoes the media’s casting of them as objects of comic relief. For example “*they look very attractive and classy...SNIGGER*”, or “*the most uneducated in their most glorious clownery, I love it!*”.

But what was more common in the data is that ‘chav’ women inspire disgust and hostility from the public. Comments expressing disgust in dramatic terms are omnipresent, for instance “*euy filth and more filth please someone wipe this things mouth- filth utter filth*” as well as those expressing their repugnance in the more simple terms of “*makes me sick*” and “*filthy chav *spits**”. Expressions of disgust are closely connected to those of enraged hostility, which indicate the depth of emotion that ‘chav’ women arouse in their role as folk devils. Comments like “*I truly hate this woman- Absolute scum*” (in response to an article about a noisy neighbour) and “*it makes my blood boil looking at this woman!!*” lead towards those comments that reveal misogynistic and violent sentiments like “*punishment should be to walk*

down the street naked as people hurl insults at her and her morbidly obese frame” or “she needs a good beating”.

Other types of responses blur the lines between resentment and a tendency to Other ‘chav’ women in comparison to oneself. First we can see that the ‘chav’ woman has become a cipher for the plethora of resentments stemming from the recession-related hardships and struggle that many Britons currently face. The portrayal of ‘chav’ woman as lazy, work-shy, financially irresponsible, and enjoying lives of vice arouse naked resentment from readers who express that they work hard and have very little. Likewise, the portrayal of ‘chav’ woman as the over fertile heads of enormous families inspires bitterness from women bemoaning their struggles to conceive. Thus all vexations one may face in contemporary Britain -being unable to pay for a holiday, unable to start a family, unable to support a family- becomes attached to the ‘chav’ woman. What we can also see is a tendency for 'Othering' among the public. Earlier in this section the proclivity of the media and politicians to assume that the reader is one of ‘us’ and not one of ‘those’ chav women was discussed, and what we can see is the public’s efforts to indeed confirm that they *are* on the correct side of this dichotomous divide. Comments such as “*is this for real...do these types of people exist?*”, “*THEY disgust me*” and “*I look at her and thank the good lord for the life I live*” exemplify an eagerness to exempt oneself from the condemnation levelled at ‘chav’ women, and indicate affiliation with what is deemed ‘right’ and ‘good’. What is also common is long-winded comments in which members of the public appear to feel it necessary to justify their lives; countless single-mothers explaining their circumstances and stressing their abilities as a mother, benefit recipients emphasising that they have always worked until now, and those living in problem areas insisting that they are different to their ‘chavy’ neighbours. This could be summarised as a type of ‘divide and conquer’ discursive practise across both the axis of gender and sexuality. Working class women want to show that they are the ‘respectable poor’, and single mothers or young mothers want to distance themselves from gendered stereotypes.

Summary

So far, this chapter has endeavoured to explain *how* the social reality within the ‘Broken Britain’ and ‘chav’ woman discourse has been created and is maintained. Whilst this is a huge discursive enterprise, the principle findings can be split very broadly into *flares* and the *appeal to the habitus*, within each of these broad categories

lie webs of subsidiary discursive practises, which overlap and reinforce one another to create a social reality that is experienced as real by many- perhaps by the majority. The evidence from the data of the techniques and practises mobilised during a flare can be given further credence by referring back to Stanley Cohen. He stressed the pivotal role that the media and moral entrepreneurs play in creating and sustaining moral panic, and casting its folk devil. Whilst the role of the media may have changed in the post-internet world, we can see that it maintains the power to create a climate of emergency, panic, and hysteria around particular events, and within such a climate it can propagate certain class and gender based prejudices, mythologies, and stereotypes.

The second broad category -the appeal to the habitus- draws directly from Pierre Bourdieu. By using his concept as a lens through which to observe and analyse the discursive practises creating this social reality we can understand the extent of their dependence on class. The 'Broken Britain' and 'chav' discourses are not superimposed on the British public, rather, they have flourished and become so deeply established because they invoke the class-based habitus. This intuitive and congenial habitus, intermingles with a similar system in which certain 'types' of women are recognisable as deviant, and through all of this the 'chav' woman is created, recognised, and reacted to.

Gender and Class

The end of this chapter considers the underlying notions of gender and class that underpin all that has been discussed up to this point. The social reality sketched out and the discursive practises and techniques that construct this reality can collectively be traced back to inveterate and abiding notions of class and gender. By concluding the research results this way, the enduring sexism and classism that actuates and propels the discursive world of 'Broken Britain' and 'chavs' can be laid bare.

First considering the underlying notions of gender -in isolation- what can be seen is a signficatory focus on the appearance, bodies, sexuality, and fertility of 'chav' women. As well as on the traditionally feminine roles of mothering and the management of the domestic realm. This can of course be framed within the patriarchal framework of the double standard, as predictably reflective of the most ubiquitous and misogynistic of sexism. Women, their bodies, and their sexuality

emerge as eternal subjects of simultaneously occurring fascination and concern- or fear.

And what can be said about the underlying notions of class -considered singularly- is that they appear to be analogous continuations of those of the Victorian era: negating any claims of a 'post-class' society. It is evident that the idea of the working class -immoral, disgusting, primitive, dangerous- remains intact. And so is the middle class desire to *know* the working-class, this abiding drive to uncover the 'Other' runs like an undercurrent through all of the discursive units. Furthermore, from the comments it becomes evident that the spotlight on the working-class allow the middle class to know *itself*, it provides a fleeting and superficial, yet consolidated, middle class identity. What is perhaps most fascinating is that today's poor -'chavs'- are likewise considered signifiers of the health of the nation. It seems that what is 'wrong', or has been 'broken', in the UK will be uncovered through an aggressive examination of the working-class. So I would argue that class is, in fact, 'everywhere and nowhere'. It is rarely articulated but its spectre underlies everything. That the social world of 'Broken Britain' and 'chavs' feels so *solid* relies on the intuitive and instinctive class-based habitus, and this world has emerged in such detail and complexity because Britons continue to interpret everything around them through this class 'sign system'. What is new, however, is the entrenchment of the Murray-esque notion of an 'underclass'. The language of the 'underclass' is sprinkled across the data; the idea of a class recognisable on account of its behaviour, and on account of its having made a conscious decision to reject mainstream societal values. Thus notions of class appear somewhat messier than a simplistic middle class/working class divide. The 'underclass' is scarier than its working class predecessor -in the eyes of the middle class- on account of this conscious violation of societal standards, but also, I argue, because it has been *feminised*.

Already it becomes evident that it is impossible to examine gender or class in isolation from one another within this topic- they are inseparably intertwined. This is because *gender lies at the heart of the class system*. As seen in chapter two, the middle and working classes came to be via an enterprise that observed differences in realms that were distinctly *feminised*: the home, the family, sexuality, the feminine ideal. The middle class enterprise that created the working class in the Victorian era can best be described as an operation in symbolic power. Bourdieu argues that exercise of symbolic power is the act of one class imposing its vision on another, so

we can understand that the middle class established what was 'right', 'normal', and 'good' within this moral and domestic sphere (Bourdieu; 1987; 15). Through the suspension of all that is 'taken for granted' we can begin to see that the 'chav' women are so problematic because they fail to meet -or reject- the middle class feminine ideal and domestic norms. If we ask '*why are we shocked by Karen Matthews' mothering style?*', '*why do we find her life unacceptable?*', '*why do we find her unattractive?*' it becomes apparent that we judge her from within a middle class paradigm of what is 'right' and what is 'normal'. Because 'chav' women fall short in this *classed* moral, domestic, and familial sphere, and are thus perceived as being devoid of emotions, love, and maternal instinct, they become dehumanised, they are 'sub-women'. So we can see how tenaciously entrenched the middle class imposition of their vision remains- and how the force of this imposition falls disproportionately on working class women. Whilst 'chav' men are also undoubtedly regarded as problematic and troublesome, the link between their behaviour and the health of the nation is not made. 'Chav' women are vested with a national and symbolic significance that their male counterparts are not.

What emerges is that with the rhetoric of an 'underclass' of single mothers, and the gendered blame so characteristic of 'Broken Britain', the gendered nature of class is more apparent now than ever. In the wake of the 'death of class', in the void left by the masculine and romanticised working class, it seems that the gendered underpinnings of the class hierarchy -which have always been there- have become more obvious.

Conclusion

This thesis has engaged with a number of issues, drawn on a diverse body of literature, attempted a type of snapshot of contemporary Britain, and delved through a hoard of data results. Yet the focus has remained quite narrow. The topic was ‘chav’ woman, and the context ‘Broken Britain’: essentially this thesis took as its subject a contemporary moral panic with a certain ‘type’ of woman at its epicentre. I approached this ‘type’ of woman through the ‘chav’ discourse, and by doing so framed it within a class paradigm, opening the topic up to a class-based analysis.

Many British friends have reacted incredulously to what they consider to be a bizarre or peculiar topic of study. And it is within this reaction that the social relevance of the study can, in fact, be found. The UK exists on the pretence of equality, there is a dominant consensus that gender inequalities are a thing of the past, and that class inequalities are now completely extinct. Thus, this project was borne out of frustration, it sought to show just how entrenched sexism and classism remain- and how intertwined the two are. The brazen and contentious hostility that is hurled towards ‘chav’ women in the data practically jumps of the page, and by shining a spotlight on such prejudices the project gains a social relevance.

The theoretical relevance of this study is that it contributes -albeit modestly- to the body of work on moral panics and folk devils, spearheaded by Stanley Cohen. The point of departure was to frame the topic within Cohen’s conceptual paradigm, and then to build upon it with using historical, class, and gender components. Many scholars working with moral panic appear to isolate it and examine it as a somewhat detached entity, also very few scholars have undertaken a gendered analysis of moral panics. Therefore this thesis has a certain theoretical relevance because it uses the conceptual of framework of folk devils and moral panics, but conceptualises it through a deep engagement with gender and class- and the historical interconnectedness of the two.

The overarching research question that guided the project was:

How are 'chav' women discursively constructed as 'folk devils' in contemporary 'Broken Britain', and what are the notions of class and gender that underlie this construction?

In order to generate a multi-layered and valuable answer to this question three subsequent sub-questions were set out. The first was historical: *'how are class and gender historically interrelated in the United Kingdom, and how were working-class women subsequently represented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?'* By drawing on post-structuralist studies of this period it became clear that gender lay at the heart of the class system during its inception, that the typological and vilified 'working class woman' was in many ways a pillar around which the wider class hierarchy was erected. The second sub-question was: *'what is the social reality produced and experienced as real by discourses of 'Broken Britain' and 'chavs'?''* This was a necessary because it was impossible to ask *how* -to begin to deconstruct the discourse- without first establishing exactly what the discursively produced reality under study *was*. The final sub-question built upon this basis and came closest to answering the overarching research question, it was: *'what discursive practises produce this social reality, and what do they suggest about underlying notions of gender and class?'*

The methodology utilised to answer these questions was discourse analysis. Because discourse analysis is as much a perspective on the world, as it is a set of tools for analysis. This style of perspective supported the project in its entirety because it enabled the topics -'chav' women and 'Broken Britain'- to be treated with suspicion as *discursive constructs* rather than something real. Rather than uncovering the reality of 'Broken Britain', or uncovering the 'truth' about 'chav' women, the aim was to uncover the processes of construction and maintenance. This methodology also fitted well with Cohen's sceptical outlook on the social world, grounded in the transactional approach to deviance. A diverse range of multi-mediated data was analysed, what was most fascinating was the interactive data sources -the reader's comments and forums- which allowed me to immerse myself the multi-faceted social world of 'Broken Britain' and its folk devil.

And now, to answer the principal question of *'how are 'chav' women discursively constructed as 'folk devils' in contemporary 'Broken Britain', and what are the notions of class and gender that underlie this construction?'* Firstly, it is quite clear

that in identifying family breakdown, fatherlessness, and single mothers as the primary causes underlying societal breakdown, the 'Broken Britain' phenomenon becomes immediately gendered.

From here we can see that two prevailing discursive practises typecast 'chav' women specifically as folk devils: *flares* and the *appeal to the habitus*. The discursive enterprise producing this reality is huge, and within each of these categories exists a tangled web of subsidiary discursive acts, yet within the confines of this study these two emerged as the most significant and powerful. The flares are perhaps the most effective at constructing the 'chav' woman as a heinous and fearful folk devil, through the association with child abuse and violence this 'type' of woman becomes evil, dangerous, sick, and highly shocking. It is through the flares that the most infamous folk devils are made, in which certain 'chav' women are cast as monsters. The appeal to the habitus from the media and moral entrepreneurs, and the recognition and response to this appeal from the public, is the more complex and subtle discursive work that constructs 'chav' women as folk devils. The multiple layers within this appeal were set out in chapter four, but what is most crucial is how this appeal to the habitus does the work of 'Othering' the 'chav' woman. In order to symbolise all that is wrong in 'Broken Britain', and in order that the general public become united in hostility towards this folk devil, it is necessary that she be different—even alien. And what is evident is that this mobilisation of the habitus can only be successful because it relies on underlying and interrelated notions, stereotypes, and mythologies of class and gender.

By studying the casting of 'chav' women as folk devils what we can recognise about contemporary notions of class is that they remain rooted in difference, 'Othering', and in an 'us and them' paradigm that is weighted with significance. The middle class continue to probe into the existence of their 'Other', and exercise their symbolic power by stereotyping them, from which they gain a unifying comfort and reassurance. Within this working class women are axial; their homes, families, appearance, bodies, sexuality are the ultimate signifier of class difference. They are overburdened with a significance that their male equivalents are not. What is most disturbing, fascinating or fear inducing about the working-class continues to be attached to the body of the working class woman. This has the paradoxical effect of simultaneously demonizing and fetishising them.

Furthermore, because working-class women deviate from this domestic, familial, and sexual 'norm' imposed by the middle class, it becomes possible to *dehumanise* them. On account of their failings as mothers, their strange sexuality, and their lack of love or nurturing qualities they are denied their humanity and become 'sub-women'. From here, it is not difficult to typecast them as folk devils.

I argue that the 'chav' woman is a recycled folk devil, her predecessor the Victorian 'working class woman' or 'prostitute' played the same role. In the still deeply entrenched -and gendered- class system it seems that poor women are the most powerful signifiers of difference, that they play a paramount role in the drawing-up of societal lines. Likewise, they come to embody all that is most disturbing and dangerous to the middle class, and the nation as a whole.

Whilst this thesis did not set out to ascertain whether Britain is 'broken', it can be suggested that this moral panic is somewhat 'hot air', that it is less a real crisis and more an opportunity -or means- through which to bolster gendered class lines. So I would argue that what we see in the folk devil characterisation of the 'chav' woman is the merging of two old prejudices: classism and sexism. There is nothing particularly new about this; the parallels with the Victorian era are easily drawn. The fear of -and fascination with- the working class, the style in which they are stereotyped and represented, and the way in which this becomes distinctly feminised. Thus, it can be proposed that the 'chav' woman is a recycled folk devil, and 'Broken Britain' is a serial moral panic.

What this thesis could not do is ask *why*; why has 'Broken Britain' emerged *now*, why has the 'chav' woman become *today's* folk devil? The historians cited in chapter two argue that the middle class enterprise that created the working class -and the working class woman- did so in response to the rapid changed of the newly industrialising society. Likewise, Cohen argues that moral panics occur in reaction to troubled time of anxiety, crisis, or breakdown. That moral panics can essentially be understood as reactions to change. If this is the case it would be fascinating to conduct major research into what these changes are, the results of which could cast greater light on why such an obviously classed and gendered folk devil has been the outcome. It would also be worthwhile to conduct research into the race component that emerged in the data, in order to generate a truly intersectional understanding.

What this work has accomplished is to expose the persistent classism and sexism in Britain today. It has shone a light on the demonization of working class women, and deconstructed this demonization, with the aim of confronting diversionary rhetorics of equality and social mobility. While this may not be revolutionary, it is more an act of remembering what has been forgotten or silenced, it is necessary. The internet -with its unbridled discursive practises and exchanges- offers a compelling opportunity to conduct analysis with which the dominant dogmas of equality and freedom may be put to the test.

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