

**The 'Chav' as a Subcultural Response to the Ideological Stigmatisation of Working Class Youth in an Ontologically Insecure Postmodernity**

**Emily Harley-O'Neill<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

The twenty-first century, as an epoch of innovation and advancement, is riddled with perplexities of social existence. While the juvenile delinquent is by no means a novel consternation, a consumer society of cultural multiplicity and precarious relations has submerged the public imagination in existential fear of transgressive youth. The 'chav' is visual phenomena of expressively branded identity, of which has come to be figuratively coalesced with the origination of a criminogenic British underclass. Characteristics of welfare dependency, sexual promiscuity and worklessness are propagandised as the epitome of a moral corrupt society. Mediated stereotype acts as a deviancy reinforcer, further ostracising an outcast youth beyond the boundaries of normative reality. A deconstruction of the underclass, as contextualised in a socio-political continuum of class hatred, is necessary for interpreting of the 'chav' identity as a subcultural acclimatisation to the ontologically insecure self.

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<sup>1</sup> Nottingham Trent University, Division of Sociology, BA (Hons) Criminology

## **Introduction**

A 'chav' phenomenon of the early twentieth-first century does not exist as a singularity, but is ideologically rooted in 'a history of respectable fears' (Pearson, 1983). Origination of a regressive underclass in postmodern Britain is perspicaciously symbiotic of the 'chav' identity as "a particular type of person, with certain lifestyle, behaviour, body techniques, speech, values and social background" (Le Grand, 2013: 218). Adverse stereotyping, as propagated by an exaggerated media of selectively articulated news, legitimates an institutional crusade against any persons deviating from a normative culture of elite interest. As such, the principled intention of this literary analysis is to theoretically contextualise the 'chav' as a contemporary folk devil, and the underclass as a symbolism of class hatred, by negotiating politically constructed ideal from social truth.

The first chapter is a diagnostic narrative of the ascending problematisation of youth, from the advent of industrial revolution in the 1800s through the post-war epoch. Juvenile delinquent, originated in the Victorian era of cataclysm, is contextualised as a distraction to occupy a beleaguered community (May, 1973). Inauspicious visibility of youth on the street and an invasion of public space aggravated bourgeois fear of abating immorality. A post-war democracy of egalitarianism, latterly rebuked as an unprofitable venture of excuse propagation, was to be hastily superseded by a neo-liberalist culture of individualist egotism and meritocracy (Heffernan, 2000; O. Jones, 2011). Whilst the elite irrefutably prospered in a globalised economy, a labouring class isolated in an aesthetically impoverished subsistence is to be reflected upon in comprehensive discussion of social stratification as an introspective product of Thatcherite deindustrialisation.

An intermediate chapter ruminates the consumer identity of post-war subculture as a transfiguring motivator for a peripheral ostracisation of working class youth from the parent culture. The symbolic meaning of style was transfigured as an extension of the self in a ritualistic resistance against hegemonic order (Hall and Jefferson, 2006). Moral panic as "a condensed political struggle to control the means of cultural reproduction", acts to "identify and conceptualise the lines of power" (S. Cohen, 2002: 1). Exaggerated ideology in a world of mediatised hyperreality has a perilous aptitude to distort the formation of social rule and constitutional law (Baudrillard, 1994). The commodity conscious 'teenager' is recounted as an oppositional force, defying socially prescribed normative boundaries in an insurgence of cultural protest. In decoding transgressive deviance as a natural venture in progression to adulthood, the legitimacy of a 'just deserts' crusade politically, bolstered by a collective vilification of juvenility succeeding the 1993 murder of James Bulger, is queried. A Blairite New Labour is to be critically negated as a mere continuation of a precedent Conservative, recasting the line of social exclusion through politicisation of anti-social behaviour, of which narrowed the ideological boundaries of deviance in an 'institutionalisation of intolerance' (Muncie, 1999).

The final chapter is an appraisal of the 'chav' as a social creation negotiated through a bygone chronology of political pragmatism. Cultural borders, "which have lost their fixed spatial moorings", are destabilised in an everyday life of disembeddedness (Young, 2007: 3). The ontologically insecure actor is located as a postmodern construct of perplexed self and infinite consumption. Deviant identity is contextualised as internalisation of societal branding as an auxiliary status, where subculture is an offering of class belonging to outcast groupings of shamed character (Becker, 1969; Downes and Rock, 2007). A British underclass, a self-inflicted assemblage of penurious choice and flawed consumption, is to be situated in a hegemonic

paradigm of inner world aesthetic and class relation. The 'chav' is commoditised as ordinary entertainment in a postmodern world of symbolic articulation (Le Grand, 2013). Concluding thought notionally exposes the 'chav' phenomena as a hidden means of elitist preservation, by projecting wrath of a corrupt existence onto an oppressed scapegoat.

### **Methodological considerations of literary analysis**

Existing literature on the 'chav', whilst sparse, narrates an impoverished and flawed consumerism as social authentication of undeserving status in a materialistic capitalism (Haywood and Yar, 2006); "The term chav is first and foremost tied to visible attributes. A person with these attributes is not only labelled a chav but is also marked or inscribed with a range of moral-aesthetic distinctions." (Le Grand, 2013: 218). Very little evaluative consideration has been given to subcultural propensity behind the contemporary origination of a British underclass, as representative of an exclusionary culture. 'Chavs: A Demonization of the Working Class' (2011), a 'trenchant exposure of new class-hatred' authored by Owen Jones, bolstered within myself, aspiration to empirically negotiate transgressive deviancy as neither a lifestyle predilection, nor simplistic rational choice, but as rooted in a perplexed interplay of cultural, political and economic reality. An "invisible poor in a classless society" negates a 'gross stereotype' of self-inflicted poverty in an oxymoron "facilitated by a lens which casts the world into binaries" (Young, 2007: 98-99). The given undergraduate dissertation is ultimately envisioned as a grounding theoretical colloquy for prospective qualitative study to be piloted in a doctoral pursuit of career academia.

A literary analysis, definable as the construction of valid, logical and coherent version of the social world in a structured discussion of existent scholarship, beholds an integral function in the 'sociological imagination' of 'intellectual craftsmanship' (Wright Mills, 1999). Without a map of literature, "it would be very difficult to see how academic research could make a new application of a methodology" or "contribute in some way to knowledge" (Hart, 1998: 26). The sociology of crime, as "an attempt to explain a world of laws, rules, courts, criminals, rule-breakers, police and prisons", must the cultural implications of a politically constructed deviance (Downes and Rock, 2007: 21). Theory "provides a backcloth and rationale for the research that is to be conducted" and "a framework within which social phenomena can be understood" (Bryman, 2012: 20). A deconstruction of social action according to ideological meaning is necessary in a systematic consideration of the 'chav' identity as a socio-political construct, to be contextualised through a paradoxical history of adolescence as an elite apparatus of moral regulation.

The relevance of interpretivism in an advanced capitalist society of pluralism is "to give voice to the underdog" and "to help see the world from the viewpoint of the oppressed rather than the oppressor" (Alasuutari et al., 2008: 6). Ontological consideration, as a coalescence of epistemology, appertains to the nature of social entities (William and May, 1996); "The central point of orientation is the question of whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built from the perceptions and actions of social actors." (Bryman, 2012: 32). Symbolic interaction requires "the student to catch the process of interpretation" through which actors "construct their action" (Blumer, 1962: 188). The hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition, within which a theoretic debate of class stratification and the

ontologically insecure self is to be standardised, goes beyond interpretivism to become concerned with human experience as it is lived (Wilson and Hutchinson, 1991). A “goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding”, to situate meaning of ‘a human in the world’, illuminates “seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives” (Laverty, 2003: 24).

## **Chapter 1: The historical exclusion of working class youth**

### **Industrial modernity and the juvenile delinquent**

A pre-modernity of spiritual discipline and agrarianism was culturally transfigured by the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century, as “development of a secular, scientifically rational, increasing industrialised and urban tradition” destabilised assumptions of a primitively existent feudal homogeneity (Hopkins Burke, 2008: 25). Establishment of a market economy, ‘production for profit’ and a differentiated wage labour stratified hierarchical status and societal relations according to means of production (Roberts, 1978; Obelkevich and Catterall, 1994). Industrialised modernity validated a polarisation of the employer and labourer, with “the creation of the urban working class whose labour fuelled the production of so much wealth but whose pockets felt so little of its benefits” (Malpass, 2005: 33). Proletarian family units mobilised in urban manufacturing centres to satisfy bourgeois demand for productive labour, often suffering overcrowded, insanitary and dilapidated living conditions (Porter, 1980). The “absence of a conception of childhood was directly related to the structure of a pre-industrial rural economy” as “children were a vital source of family income and were placed in work as soon as they could be economically active” (Muncie, 1984: 30). A bourgeois elite lived an opulent reality through exploitation of the working poor, for whom child labour was a necessitude of survival in an emergent capitalism of the Victorian era.

The 1832 Reform Act, “as perhaps the central political events of the nineteenth century”, symbolised constitutional fears of a hostile revolutionary threat arising from working class resistance to the myth of industrialised prosperity and the urbanised production of chaotic, disorganised and criminogenic ‘slums’ (Phillips and Wetherell, 1995: 411). The “entry of the demos into the political arena” ostensibly ‘gave voice’ to the oppressed and their socio-political demands for the regulation of working conditions (Johnson, 1991: 904), but offered little by way of empowerment, electoral representation and practical change. A series of Factory Acts introduced from 1833 to 1878, instrumental in “the expression of a shift in opinion about children’s capacity for understanding”, prompted an eventual removal of children from wage labour and alternative institution of a compulsory education system (Magarey, 1978: 19). The ‘deadultification’ of childhood emphasised the need for formalised socialisation and rigid discipline according to bourgeois values of an ordered society (Muncie, 1984; Hopkins Burke, 2008). A moral welfarist ethos transfigured the child as a characteristically innocent and dependant social being to be protected from adult existence. The ‘Reformatory School Movement’, to “distinguish between the dangerous classes of young offenders, and the perishing class of incipient criminals living a life of vagrancy and theft”, was designed to “remould and

recast” the delinquent child into a capitalist asset by way of “corrective training” (May, 1978: 28).

A “widespread public and media concern about the perceived crisis of control in the industrial cities of Victorian England” had materialised by the latter half of the nineteenth century, with intensifying demand from a discontented middle class to punitively rectify “the apparent ineffectiveness of the justice system and other agencies of control to contain it” (Pitts, 2003b: 73). The criminogenic lower order was considered a product of moral disease fashioned outside of conventional normality (Valentine, 1996). To the labouring classes, economically inactive children in compulsory education were not held as a precious and valuable commodity to be nurtured, but as a fiscal burden on limited resources. As industrial slums were suffocated by conditions of severe destitution and parental abandonment, children were often forced into an “artful chartist dodger” existence, depending on petty criminality as a means of survival on the city streets (Pearson, 1983: 156). A visibly threatening youth “running wild about the streets” legitimated upper class fears of adolescent ruffianism, street gangs, vagrancy, drunkenness and violence (Cunningham, 2006: 162). The ‘Peaky Blinder’, the “original hooligans” of Birmingham recognisable by uniform of “bell-bottom trousers, neck scarf, heavy belt, peaked cap and short cropped hair with a donkey fringe”, actuated a new subcultural threat to bourgeois culture by “spreading fear into the hearts and minds of the Victorians of impending social collapse” (Pearson, 1983: 157).

By the early 1900s, the delinquent was established, not only in the popular imagination as an emblematic depiction of an immoral and non-conformist working class youth, but as a legally recognised construct (Pratt, 1993). A juvenile justice system emerged from within a welfarist shift toward ‘penal modernism’ under “a social democratic form of politics and civic narrative of inclusive”, amid which the creation of the 1948 welfare state was founded (Garland, 2001: 48-49). The young criminal was ideologically reconceptualised as a “moral orphan” befallen to anomic conditions of weakening social norms and informal control (May, 1973: 23), in need of ‘rescue’ and ‘punishment’ (Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1994). By influence of “pressure from politically powerful, religious, philanthropic and penal-reform groups”, adult prison was rendered wholly inapt for adolescent persons by way of “corruption, brutality and indiscipline” often proving counterproductive in efforts of individual correction (Pitts, 2003b: 72). A gradual liberalisation of ‘doli incapax’ lawfully freed children from absolute criminal responsibility as alternatives to custody were promoted to be a socially just penalty of multilateral purpose, unimpeded by exclusionary lifecycle repercussions of deviant branding (Magarey, 1978; Hopkins Burke, 2008).

The penal-welfare framework, of which legally separated the juvenile from the adult with an alleviation of culpability and recognition of perpetual criminogenic risk, endeavoured to create a proportionate justice whilst satisfying the rehabilitative ideal (Garland, 2001). Yet, a paradoxical reality subjected often innocent youth to a ‘spreading of social control’ under “the guise of protecting children who were considered to be living in undesirable surrounding” (Hopkins Burke, 2008: 61). A rigorous authoritative stratagem of regulatory surveillance in tandem with fanatical media representation distorted “information of the social world and the role of youth within it”, blurring the penal boundaries between cultural reality and sensationalistic myth (Muncie, 1984: 13). The era of industrialised modernity was demarcated by cataclysm of social disturbance and pecuniary confusion, for which proletarian youth became the scapegoated distraction (Hall et al., 1978); “As an example of a golden age of order and stability, the early Victorian era is not just a failure, it is a disaster area” (Pearson, 1983: 182).

### **Post-war Britain, the myth of affluence and teenage adolescence**

The 1942 publication of 'Social Insurance and Allied Services', with a "men stand together with their fellows" ethos (Beveridge, 1942: 13), emphasised the necessity for social reform through politicisation of voter demand to end austerity and redistribute privilege as reward for the united sacrifices of war. Clement Attlee's Labour government was elected by a landslide majority in 1945 and tasked with restoring the decrepit conditions of post-war society; "The Labour Party is a socialist party and proud of it. The ultimate purpose is the establishment of a socialist commonwealth of Great Britain. Free, democratic, efficient, progressive, public spirited, its material resources organised in the service of the British people." (cited in Dale, 2000: 55). A discontented workforce disregarded Winston Churchill, the wartime Prime Minister, as neither fit nor proficient to lead towards a newly peaceful and just social order (Roberts, 1978).

Political efforts were committed to achieving social justice and economic stability under a Keynesian social democracy, characterised by egalitarian consensus of "general affluence and economic security, full employment, individual fulfilment in an open society" (Padgett and Paterson, 1991: 1). The 1948 National Insurance Act abolished poor law and introduced the welfare state to provide a system of basic social security 'from cradle to grave', below which no citizen should fall below (Obelkevich and Catterall, 1994). Visible action against Beveridgean social evils of 'ignorance', 'want', 'squalor', 'idleness' and 'disease' was considered a necessary prerequisite to the progression away from interwar depression and the achievement of a cohesive post-war settlement. Prospects of urban regeneration and the development of "a housing system rather than a housing market" was a "potent symbol of government commitment to the idea of building a better society after the bitterness and hardship of the 1920s and 1930s, and the sacrifices of the war years" (Malpass, 2005: 1). The "productive advantages of capitalism" were to be retained, whilst the social costs of inequality were to be minimised in an effort to "humanise capitalism" under the safety net of full employment (Heffernan, 2002: 4-5).

By 1955 wartime rationing had ended and "Britain was believed to be entering an age of affluence" epitomised by "the expansion of the welfare state, equal educational opportunity and new patterns of commodity consumption" (Muncie, 1984: 103-104). A modernisation of the economy briefly halted social decline and encouraged a new prosperity. An "epochal shift from industrial to consumer capitalism" transformed the dynamics of production and technology, emasculating traditional working class life "revolved around the certainty of paid employment and a specific mode of exploitation" (Hall et al., 2008: 21-22). The post-war era came to be defined by an apparent 'embourgeoisement' as actuated by a new phenomenon of disposable income, the modernisation of leisure and 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen, 1899/1994; Hall and Jefferson, 2006). A consumer society, of which veritably affirmed hierarchical divisions and created a social stratification of commodities, was progressively realised to be little more than a political façade amid the increasingly frustrated lower orders (Corrigan and Frith, 2006). Britain was "divided by an unfair class system, tattered social justice and dogmatic politics", absent of "unity, solidarity and partnership" (H. Jones, 1997: 3).

The reinstatement of Winston Churchill's government in 1951 initiated a thirteen year Conservative rule, "a vehicle which advanced post-social democratic neo-liberal political agenda" (Heffernan, 2001: 18), epitomised by an unindustrialised egoism and the gradual condemnation of the welfare state. The desire for a post-war settlement of socialist consensus

intended by the 1945 Labour government was in decline as the upper class electorate perhaps began to acknowledge the fiscal burden of nationalist ideology in a hierarchical capitalism of meritocracy (Roberts, 1978). The economic shift from production to consumption enabled a hypercompetitive labour market, destabilised local economy structures, and further polarised “the socially mobile elite” from “a new lumpenproletariat” (P. Cohen, 1972: 23). Council housing was reconceptualised from “from the crowning glory of the new welfare state”, representative of David Lloyd George’s 1919 ‘home fit for heroes’ promise, to “mass produced barracks” for a declining industrial class (Hanley, 2012: 103). Policies of full employment proved non-profitable and were considered to be incompatible with the “organic intelligentsia of modern capitalism” controlled by a cultural milieu of prosperity (Gramsci, 1971: 5). Demand for a highly specialised labour force prompted the demise of the British industry, rendering manual workers as dispensable and economically irrelevant (Knepper, 2007). The labouring poor were progressively excluded from a middle class existence of legitimacy and prestige as education became “an apparatus of occupational selection”, in which the unskilled were unable to compete (Roberts, 1978: 106). As traditional communities eroded and the highly differentiated division of labour roused with a Durkheimian shift from ‘mechanical’ to ‘organic’ solidarity, individual attachments to elite institutions weakened in ‘a crisis of social capital’ and the proletarian adolescent became socially disenfranchised (Hall and Jefferson, 2006; Downes and Rock, 2007).

The newly affluent consumer, denoted by paradoxical imagery of the commodity conscious teenager living in a world “unpenetrated by adult interests” with “no respect for authority” (Muncie, 1984: 9), motivated public outrage of declining morality as an ascending threat to the social order. Resistance to the ‘parent culture’ was understood as a symbiotic and innate condition of youth socialised within a delinquency, generating environment of the lower orders (Newburn, 2013). A ‘reaction formation’ of alike peers, forced into a subsistence of routinised labour and educational disadvantage, symbolised a dynamic rebellion against prestigious hegemony from which they find themselves socially, economically and politically excluded (A. Cohen, 1955; Clarke et al., 2006). Devoid of social status and political relevance, the ‘young intelligentsia’ created and sought belonging to a subcultural identity as a means “to express and resolve, albeit magically, the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture” (P. Cohen, 1972: 23). The powerful, yet sufficiently imperilled elite, intended to vigorously protect and preserve their comfortable existence of meritocratic prosperity through an institutionalised “onslaught on the leisure occupations of the poor and labouring classes” (Magarey, 1978: 21). While “the interplay of class and labour market heavily influences young people’s life chances”, it is governmental policy “operating on the assumption that young people’s culture, their behaviour and mores” that “determines how successfully they will step up the class ladder” (H. Jones, 1997: 5).

### **Thatcherism, collapse of the British industry and an emergent underclass**

Trade union strikes of the 1978 ‘Winter of Discontent’, motivated by public sector pay caps enforced under James Callaghan’s 1976 government, instigated a decline of working class trust in the once socialist Labour philosophy and sanctioned a Conservative electoral success in 1979 (Obelkevich and Catterall, 1994). The “pounding suffered by the Labour movement under Thatcherism”, as defined by the wholesale defeat of the Miners’ Strike, meant “class no longer seemed a plausible vehicle of change for many leftists” (O. Jones, 2011: 266). The oil crisis of

the 1970s “heralded an international recession which led to the restructuring of national economies on a global scale”, necessitating a ‘see-saw’ like gesticulation of exploitation and domination, “as one class goes up the other must inevitably go down” (H. Jones, 1997: 4). Margret Thatcher’s neo-liberalist rule actuated “a death of the social” and an almost complete reversal of post-war consensus as promoted by Labour predecessors (Hall et al., 2008: 6).

A privatisation of free market economics reinforced an egotistical individualism in the pursuit of social status as class hierarchy came to be determined according to assumptions of meritocracy and fiscal accomplishment (Schwartz, 1999; Crompton, 2008). Achievement, success and status became a social competition in which “individual freedom and choice were to be confined to the sphere of market relations” (Hayes, 1994: 89). The collapse of British industry and traditional manufacturing labour transfigured once respected and proud working class communities “from salt of the earth” to “scum of the earth” (O. Jones, 2011: 72). The poorest in society were ideological segregated into the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ as a neo-liberal denial of poverty attributed socio-economic disadvantage to self-inflicted personal failings and ‘choice incompetency’ (Bauman, 1998). Claimants of the benefit state were labelled ‘welfare scroungers’, acting as representation of the British underclass burdening society with worklessness, young parenthood and informally casual lifestyles (Murray, 1990).

The 1989 Social Security Act was introduced to aid the “culturally handicapped”, to ‘abridge the existing benefit structure’ and to ‘strengthen the capacity for personal autonomy’ by redirecting income from working class wage earners to economically inactive individuals (Roberts, 1978: 110). Yet, efforts to bolster social independence amid a working poor merely shifted claimant dependency “to a different sphere”, of which is “equally, or more, entrenching and debilitating” (Pilcher and Wagg, 1996: 121). The ‘Right to Buy’ Scheme implemented under the 1979 Housing Act, whilst intended as a means for upward mobility for the less prosperous, created “social concentration camps” infested with a cyclical culture of unemployment and poverty in reality (Sharp, 1940: 85). A ‘poverty of aspiration’ rendered working class children unequipped to ‘play the market’ unlike their upper class counterparts, of whom inherit already established networks of social, cultural and human capital that predetermine societal stature (Brown, 2004). The stigmatic personification of council housing residency forced generations of youth into a exclusionary self-fulfilling prophecy of spoilt identity (Malpass, 2005); “The fact that you are living in a place populated almost exclusively by the poor makes those who are less poor unlikely to enter the area unless they have to, further entrenching its isolation and the stigma of living there. That isolation, in turn, limits the aspirations of those poor people by presenting few clear alternatives to the lives around them.” (Hanley, 2012: 139).

An apparent ‘equality of opportunity’ configured poverty as a deficiency in personal autonomy, thereby eliminating the revolutionary threat of a state blaming public (Crompton, 2008). The institutional elite have “socially engineered” working class communities into a deprived subsistence and manipulated the popular imagination into a condemnatory ideology of an unworthy poor to serve as legitimate justification for social polarisation and inequality (O. Jones, 2011: 34). Failure “to grasp the role of public welfare” fuels “nostalgia for a non-existent age of pure voluntarism” and “raises unrealistic expectations for the capacity of private action to ameliorate public problems” (Katz, 1995: 21). A capitalist order is dependent on a hierarchical structure of economics in which the construction and preservation of an unskilled underclass perhaps acts as a security barrier to protect the superiority of a prosperous bourgeois.

## **Chapter 2: Media power, political agenda and popular ideology in postmodernity**

### **Subcultural resistance, deviant ego and cultural politics**

Post-war Britain “experienced a seismic change in values and structure” as Clement Attlee’s social egalitarianism was progressively outmoded by a monopolistically competitive market of commodity consumption (Young, 2005: 102). The labouring class, reliant on local industry for fiscal self-sufficiency and community stature, came to be socially bound by the ‘myth of embourgeoisement’ and ostracised into an existence of redundancy and welfare dependency. The ‘teenager’, created in the 1950s as a modern reconfiguration of the ‘juvenile delinquent’, was emblematically attached to rebellious imagery of proletarian youth living in a “subterranean world of play” (Young, 1972: 124). Early subculture, demarcated by the ‘Peaky Blinder’, was symbiotically reinvented as commodity consciousness motivated a shift in public consternation from “those legally defined as explicitly criminal” to “those socially defined as deviant” by way of cultural regression (Muncie, 1984: 95).

A ‘hard-consuming Keynesianism’, where “material success merely became a staging on the route to self-expression and discovery”, destabilised traditional discipline of work and deferred gratification to create “a large underclass of transient, insecure and grossly undervalued labour” (Young, 2005: 102-103). Mertonian detachment of an outcast poor from conventionalist society occurred with “a lack of equilibrium between social prescribed means and ends of action” (Bernburg, 2002: 729), producing anomic strain, of which is acutely potent amid a deindustrialised class of labourers. The ‘new culture of capitalism’ of global institutions and corporate finance service transfigured occupational hierarchy as to further polarise the class structure of inequality (Sennett, 2006). Casualisation of the labour industry emasculated the proletariat and roused an intergenerational culture of ‘normlessness’ as expressed by notoriously violent British ‘Skinheads’ in the 1960s, of whom assumed territorial identity as a “fundamental anchor of belonging” to substitute the positivistic self-concept formerly generated by traditionalised community ties (Castells, 2010: xxiii). The working class delinquent was no longer a “frustrated social climber” but a “cultural innovator and critic”, autonomously rebelling against an institutional elite (S. Cohen, 2002: xlix). A developing free market economy deficient of normative boundaries, and circumscribed to ‘monetary fetishism’, enslaved the lower orders to a subsistence of ‘institutional anomie’ as “the peculiar disease of modern industrial man (Downes and Rock, 2007; 91). To behold infinite materialistic aspiration through a vexing inaccessibility to legitimate opportunity, as all too often borne in “the brutalised condition of the slums” (Hopkins Burke, 2008: 137), produces a respective paradox between ‘an internal commitment to conform’ and ‘the external opportunities to deviate’ (Briar and Piliavin, 1965). A “social deconstruction of men as the male breadwinner amongst the poorest groups in society” in an absence of the expectation of lifetime employment has made uncertain self-identity and weakened cultural bond (Rubery, 1996: 26). Traditional patterns of routinised wartime existence in Britain, “swept aside to be replaced by a new, and superficially less class ridden system”, systematically dislocated “familiar landmarks” and “presaged the collapse of a whole way of life” (Hebdige, 1979: 74).

A capitalist order “makes incompatible demands” and “it is at these points of pressure that subcultures have evolved to solve of problems that arise”, to “borrow elements of the larger culture and rework them into distinctive forms” (Downes and Rock, 2007: 126). The commodity oriented subculture acts to bridge an ideological contradiction between “traditional working class

puritanism” and a “new hedonism of consumption”, in an attempt “to retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in their parent culture” (P. Cohen, 1972: 85). A consumer society offered the opportunity for reinvention of traditional class-based identities, with the increased spending power of the teenager expediting novel constructions of identity (Bennett, 1999). The ‘Teddy Boys’, a branding invented by The Daily Mirror in 1953, came forth as the original subculture of a newly prosperous epoch, culturally trademarked by ‘theft and transformation’ of the ‘Savile Row Edwardian Suit’ formerly attired by ‘upper class dandies’ (S. Cohen, 2002); “The dress consisted of a long, narrow, lapelled, waisted jacket, narrow trousers, ordinary toe-capped shoes, and a fancy waistcoat. Shirts were white with cutaway collars and ties were tied with a Windsor knot.” (Jefferson, 2006: 69). Working class espousal of style fashioned by the social elite is then an emblematic symbolism of a visceral assumption of normative archetypes peddled by the parent culture of upper class morality, in a perplexed effort to acquire stature from loci of cultural exclusion. The knowing consumption of particular apparel expressed much more than preferred dress, but symbolised a resistance against hegemonic institutionalisation and gave “cultural meaning to social plight” in a ‘performativity toward the other’ (Jefferson, 1976: 86). It is through the “distinctive rituals of consumption” that “the subculture at once reveals its secret identity and communicates its forbidden message” as an act of bricolage against orthodox culture (Hebdige, 1979: 103).

A defining peculiarity between pre-war and post-war subcultural formation is the potential for modern spectacularisation precipitated by ‘the advent of the mass media’, ‘changes in the constitution of the family’ and ‘shifts in the relative status of work’ (Hebdige, 1979). Mediatisation has “allowed for the production of a particular order of youth subcultures” because of “its ability to disseminate images of the signs which invoke a range of meanings” (Stratton, 1985: 197). Emergent styles of ‘symbolic innovation’ came to be ideologically fused with deviant values, consigning the young to “a self-contained world with their own preoccupations” whereby “their entrance into adult status is frustrated” (S. Cohen, 2002: 151). A liberally permissive working class invigorated a perpetuating fear of adolescence as a constitutional threat to morality and reinvented an ‘us verses them’ continuum of interpersonal polarisation (Young, 2007). The social deviant is not an objective fact, but an operative construct of cultural politics as fortified by institutionalised intolerance of anomalistic, yet not necessarily iniquitous, behaviour (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994); “Deviance is not a quality that lies in the behaviour itself, but in the interaction between the person who commits an act and those who respond to it” (Becker, 1963: 14).

Moral entrepreneurs as ‘the articulators of moral indignation’ design an exclusionary society in a subliminal coercion of idealistic elitism, forcing working people to “make a life for themselves in the negotiated spaces of a dominant culture” (Hall et al., 1978: 164). Mass media, then, orchestrate a hegemonic reproduction of the institutional structure of power as to control “the means of mental production” in socially constructing a universalised reality symbiotic with “ruling ideas of the epoch” (Marx, 1845/1970: 64). The ‘outsider’, a person whom deviates from absolute conformity to entrepreneurial directive of apposite human behaviour, is omitted to the peripheries of society in an intentional disempowerment of a recalcitrant dynamic amid the lower orders (Becker, 1963; Lemert 1972; Erikson, 2005). A mechanical production of elite ideology “manages to convince the rest of the society” that “the real enemy is not the crisis in capitalism, nor capitalism itself”, but “the criminal and the lax way things have been dealt with in the past” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994: 165). The social edifice of unorthodoxy, structured “by the various commercial and political constraints in which newspapers, radio and television operate”

(S. Cohen, 2002: 7), is subtly, yet persuasively, negotiated to a public audience through ‘an inventory of coded images’. Processes of ‘becoming deviant’ as “conceived in terms of the gradual construction of a role and an identity” are played out in a distorted production of ideological symbolism (Downes and Rock, 2007: 134).

Versions of reality “become impregnated with the mark of media imagery” as “social meanings and social differences are inextricably tied up with representation” in postmodernity of virtualised communication and misinformed truth (Young, 2005: 103). Public imagination is interlaced in “an infinite hall of mediated mirrors”, whereby “battles over image, style and meaning” emerge as ‘symbols of trouble’ in “the contest over crime control, deviance and normality” (Ferrell et al., 2008: 81-82). Liberalist youth subculture contradictory of the traditionalist adult world, typified by sexual permissiveness and normalised drug taking, is intrinsically coalesced with criminogenic imagery of a morally corrupt society (Shiner and Newburn, 2007); “The Mods and Rockers symbolized something far more important than what they actually did. They touched the delicate and ambivalent nerves through which post-war social change in Britain was experienced.” (S. Cohen, 2002: 161). A moral panic, as an exhibition of “increased hostility” toward persons “collectively designated as the enemy of the respectable, law-abiding society” whose behavioural predilections are seen to jeopardise “the very existence of the society” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994: 157), acts to dilute a perceptible threat to elitism by publicly validating the social disenfranchisement of a ‘subordinate out-group’ (Young, 2005). Deviant branding peddled by societal assumption of mediated stereotype is consequential in producing a self-fulfilling prophecy and the internalisation of a ‘falsely defined’ master status (Merton, 1968). An ‘amplification spiral’ of authoritative control and social intolerance obfuscate efforts to validate ego in a “self-defeating transgression” of “hopelessness, entrapment, or loss of control” (Lemert, 1972: 64). The ‘folk devil’ is thus defenceless against an institutionalised onslaught of propagandised stigma, with little choice but drift into a transgressive existence of retreatist subculture to become “the thing he is described as being” (Tannenbaum, 1939: 20).

### **The James Bulger murder and a neo-liberalist authoritarianism**

A social production of news within an idealistic paradigm of cultural normality “recharges and extends the definitions and images in question”, “keeping them circulating as part of the common stock of taken-for-granted knowledge” (Murdock, 1974: 208-209). The murder of James Bulger, whose brutalised and lifeless body was discovered, bound to a railway track on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1993, provoked “the kind of outbreak of moral condemnation usually reserved for the enemy in time of war” (King, 1995: 172). Normal requirements of reporting “were abandoned in favour of undiluted, vitriolic editorializing” as press coverage demonised the 10-year-old perpetrators, Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, as culpably malevolent (Franklin and Petley, 1996: 134). Libelled by The Sun newspaper as “products of the devil” in 1993, the schoolboys became a ‘virtual metaphor’ for the postmodern forfeiture of chaste adolescence in a debauched society (Cole, 2006: 125). The ‘hyper-politicisation of youth crime’, as peddled by tabloid journalism and unreservedly assumed by a credulous public, blurred the conceptual boundary between sensationalistic imagery of the menacing teenager and social reality of ostracised innocence (McLaughlin et al., 2001; Muncie, 2008). The “decade which began with the discovery of the dangers of childhood” had “turned into the decade of dangerous children” (Campbell and Dawson, 1994: 30).

A “discourse of evil” permeated “its way into government policy on youth justice” in the wake of the perhaps contemptible trial, of which systematically led media broadcasting and wrought public demand for a return to retributive discipline (Cole, 2006: 127). Terror bred “in the face of indiscipline from below which lies at the heart of our culture” galvanised a moral paranoia of the ‘pre-pubescent super-predator’ (Pitts, 2003a: 3). The mobilisation of “adult fear and moral panic about the moral degeneracy of youth”, in a “climate of child hate” recasting “child offenders as devils”, legitimated “a series of tough law and order responses” (Muncie, 2008: 5). Penal-welfare, as fortified by philanthropic action for human rights in a post-Victorian Britain, was to be superseded by an institutional crusade pledged to restore the rule of law (Pitts, 1997). Bifurcation policy endorsed under Thatcherite managerialism, legally discerning between “run of the mill offenders with whom less severe measures can be taken” and “dangerous offenders who can be made subject to much tougher measures” (Cavadino et al., 2013: 27), was denounced as the instigator for a generational upsurge of rouge youth. A ‘crime breeding excuse culture’ was constitutionally blighted in ascendancy toward a ‘populist punitiveness’ of responsabilisation as the modernised politics of crime and punishment (Bottoms, 1995; Muncie, 1999); “We shall no longer judge the success of our system of justice by a fall in our prison population. Let us be clear, prison works.” (Cited in Newburn, 2003: 72).

Anti-custody reformation, introduced under the 1991 Criminal Justice Act, was promptly forsaken for a renaissance of youth imprisonment, with an accumulative penal population to be celebrated as a political triumph (Simon, 2000). A repoliticisation of law and order necessitated a policy shift to accord with “the dictates of an invariably retributive common sense”, rather than “the imperatives of experts and criminal justice professionals” (Pitts, 2003b: 85-86). The 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, intended to ‘make further provision in relation to criminal justice’ and ‘to amend or extent the criminal law’, signified the origination of ‘a new consensus on criminal justice’ as emancipated from bureaucratic constraint of orthodox politics (Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1994). Secure training camps “were to be rethought” to “provide tougher and more physically demanding regimes” in a return to the disciplinary stratagem of ‘short, sharp, shock’ designed to “knock criminal tendencies out of young offenders” (Hopkins Burke, 2008: 75). Reversion to detention invigorated a bygone ‘remoralisation thesis’, once again ascribing “a feckless underclass of dysfunctional family and a parenting deficit” to be “the root of the problem of youth crime” (Muncie, 1999: 171). A parochial fear of ‘the dangerous other’, propagated in a ‘sovereign state’ of idiosyncratic chaos, roused expectation of an exclusionary criminal justice as “more attuned to the private freedoms of the market than the public freedoms of universal citizenship” (Garland, 2001: 193-194). An ideological fracturing between “an every child matters priority” and “the no more excuses imperative”, as characteristic of ‘a new correctionalism’, socially validated an ‘institutional child abuse’ that was to be perpetuated by the forthcoming New Labour government (Goldson and Muncie, 2006: 223).

### **Reinvention of New Labour, anti-social behaviour and an exclusionary justice**

A Blairite reformation of a dualistically principled New Labour was necessitated by the eighteen-year success of Conservative directive, with “their accomplishment in rooting existing neo-liberalism ever deeper within Britain’s political and economic system” (Heffernan, 2000: vii). Old Labour philosophy of socially democratic consensus and egalitarianism was ousted in a

modernised crusade of policy convergence to electorally persuade the constituency of ‘middle England’ (Crewe, 2001); “Labour had failed to understand that the old working class was becoming a new middle class: aspiring, consuming, choosing what was best for themselves and their families. They had outgrown crude collectivism.” (Gould, 1999: 4). The ‘third way’, a “new form of left-of-centre politics”, notionally endeavoured to ameliorate social polarity by devolving ‘equality of outcome’ for ‘equality of opportunity’ in a coalescence of “social solidarity with a dynamic economy” (Giddens, 2000: 5). A ‘stakeholder society’, with “strong emphasis on the new employment opportunities which will flow from sustained growth”, “set itself laissez-faire economic policies” to “offer a new vision which is different from that of the Conservative party” (H. Jones, 1997: 217). New Labour “proved highly successful in creating coherent policy narratives such as that of around work, welfare and social exclusion”, yet “its constitutional reforms were timid and piecemeal”, futile in “addressing the deep inequalities across British society” (Driver and Martell, 2002: 223). While “the economy as a whole continued to prosper” (Ackerman and Alstott, 1999: 1), an inchoate underclass, invisible to ‘a classless society’, came to be progressively impoverished and criminogenic by nature of social expulsion from orthodoxical life prospect (Young, 2007).

A ‘balance of intervention’ was to be achieved by “action-oriented patterns of political argument” as rooted in “the resurrection of past principles combined with new attitudes”, and “a demotion of politics as an arena of planning, social responsibility and public welfare” (Freeden, 1999: 43). The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act roused a preventative ethos coalesced with latterly denounced localisation of statutory regulation, administrated as a mechanism of disciplinary control for transgressive youth (Pitts, 2003c); “It shall be the principle aim of the youth justice system to prevent offending by children and young persons. In addition to any other duty which they are subject, it shall be the duty of all persons and bodies carrying out functions in relation to the youth justice system to have regard to that aim.” (Cited in Marshall and Thomas, 2011: 191). An ostensibly modernised youth justice was reconceptualised as ‘a delinquency management service’, in which “provisions are explicitly directed not only at young offenders, but at young people in general” (Muncie, 1999: 149). Legislative abolition of ‘rebuttable presumption that a child is *doli incapax*’ authenticated existent public assumption of an upcoming generation of perilous youth, deserved of ‘just deserts’ penance, as an irrefutable social truth (McLaughlin et al., 2001; Hopkins Burke, 2008). A metamorphosing criminality was “to be tackled not just by the police and the courts”, but “by new Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs)” in a multi-agency stratagem to responsabilise community and actuate a proactive style of policing to “encourage a new kind of attention to local trouble spots” (Carrabine et al., 2009: 148). Civil procedure of curfew and supervision, intentioned as to negotiate transgressive propensity in an early intervention of remedial discipline and social inclusion, paradoxically roused an authoritative blurring of need with risk (Hannah-Moffatt, 1999). Evidence-based governance of actuarial classification and resource management, perhaps susceptible to an elitist interpretation of partiality, “problematized youth crime within the parameters of the risk prevention paradigm” (Gray, 2005: 939). An apparently communitarian New Labour latterly “developed an authoritarian character”, more characteristic of the precedent Conservatism, “using an expanding centre state apparatus to deliver outcomes” rather than “giving encouragement to the relatively autonomous powers of civil society” (Hopkins Burke, 2008: 241). A ‘post-bureaucratic criminal justice’ of the Blairite era acted to “exacerbate the very problems it purports to address” and “deny young people access to those very rights it claims to protect” in an ‘institutionalisation of intolerance’ (Muncie, 1999: 172).

The broken windows theory, of which assumes visual cues of minor public disorder in symbiotic consequentialism with ‘a downward spiral of urban decay’, philosophically bolstered a Blairite politics of communitarianism and zero-tolerance (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Newburn, 2002). An exteriorised disorder “can lead to a vicious cycle of community decline” and “a reduction in natural social controls” (Straw and Michael, 1996: 4). Anti-social behaviour, statutorily defined under Section 1 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act as action perceived ‘in a manner that caused or was likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons’, was politicised in the early twenty-first century as to neutralise “a fundamental lack of respect” expressive of post-war youth (Home Office, 2003: 7). Once “youthful exuberance” was to be “interpreted as a sign of future criminality” with reflexive assumptions of ill-intent acting as justification for an outlawing of sub-criminality (Blackwell and Wilson, 2014: 285). Enforceable against ‘any persons aged 10 or over’, the Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) gave “power to local officials to criminalise conduct”, appropriated by “low standards of proof”, in way a “which is in total contradiction to other strategies to reduce social exclusion” (Hopkins Burke, 2008: 191). The power of imprisonment on violation is depictive of blurred boundaries in “a hybrid criminal-civil process”, with “a corresponding dilution of the presumption of innocence” as a seemingly unheeded constitutional breach of an adversarial due process (Flint and Nixon, 2006: 946). Perceptive cognisance of anti-social behaviour, existent “in the eyes of the beholder” (Tonry and Bildsten, 2009: 578), facilitates an exploitation of institutional control as ‘a panacea for all of society’s ills’ (National Council for Civil Liberties, 2004). The ASBO, ambiguous in nature, “could easily used not just to protect the vulnerable”, but “to restrict those engaged in minority cultural or political activity unpopular with local councils” in a speculative victimisation of “people subject to rumour, gossip and prejudice” (Parratt, 1998: 2). New Labour’s anti-social behaviour agenda has “unintentionally served to feed negative stereotypes of youth”, situating a ‘chav’ underclass as an almost universalised metaphor for “a deeper social malaise” in a postmodernity of ontological insecure expression (Bannister and Kearnes, 2012: 381).

### **Chapter 3: The social construction of a ‘chav’ underclass**

#### **Class stratification and an ontologically insecure self**

Postmodernity is “a reactionary and mechanical reflection of social change” characterised by ‘a globalisation of diversity’ and ‘the aestheticization of everyday life’ (Featherstone, 2007: 10). The rise of a cultural economy has revolutionised the symbolic content of human consciousness, from a pre-war localism of family tradition and simplistic need to a wholly paradoxical reality of ‘commodity fetishism’ (Marx, 1845/1970). A “comfort-seeking creature” is “replaced by the striving subject of late modernity” in a ‘turbo-charged capitalism’ absent of collectively assumed boundaries (Young, 2007: 1). Monopolistic competitiveness, where “the luxuries of today become the necessities of tomorrow” (Downes and Rock, 2007: 101), is consequential in production of an exclusionary social order. Epochal ‘modes of life’, of which “swept us away from all tradition”, have “come to alter some of the most intimate and personal features of our day-to-day existence” (Giddens, 1990: 4). The worship of money and material being exerts “more power over human lives than any other single commodity”, infiltrating the subconscious

as the sole motivator for decision and choice (Oleson, 2005: 83). Needs are paralleled to want in “a tyranny of the unnecessary”, as “a never ending progression of new things to want” induces “an insidious new form of dissatisfaction” (Eastbrooker, 2003: 171).

Consumption has come to be “a foundational rather than merely epiphenomenal character of society”, acting as a cultural extension of the self (Corrigan, 1997: 1). Whilst existentialism is abounded as an intrinsic part of being, “at no stage in history” has “there been such a premium on identity” and “constructing a narrative of development” (Young, 2007: 3). The dawn of ‘reflexive modernity’ awakened a mystification of self-concept expressly pertinent amid social out-groups, of whom are perhaps both unapt, and unwilling, to inhabit the conventional social world (Giddens, 1990; Hall et al. 2008). A chaos of identity is externalised in a self-reinforcing circularity of an “phantasmagoric other” availed as “a ready prop for ontological insecurity” (Young, 2007: 37). Commercially paralysed by ‘the myth of embourgeoisement’, an aesthetically impoverished proletariat is ostracised from an elitist pursuit of meritocratic stature, yet responsibilised for a politically aided ineptitude of social capital (Hall et al., 2008). A British underclass, as offensive to “the cherished values of the majority”, desire “the same joys of consumer life” regardless of the paradox between the cultural means of realisation. (Bauman, 1998: 78). Class stratification is a relational product of contradictory ideals of existence, formed by differing access to the institutional hegemony (Crompton, 2008; Le Grand, 2013).

Life is “patterned by symbolic indications”, by which “people continuously interpret themselves, their settings and their partners” (Downes and Rock, 2007: 162). A societally articulated edifice of deviant perspicacity as an objective reality is negotiated and upheld by the inner moral world of self. (Giddens, 2000). Ascribing symbolic meaning is a cultural process “where mass-produced symbols circulate amidst the situated experiences of everyday life” (Ferrell, 2006: 270). The politics of deviance is necessary to social life as a boundary reinforcer for the conforming preponderance and a yardstick for intolerable action (Young, 2007); “Social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others.” (Becker, 1963: 9). To brand and outcast deviating persons is a mechanism of political doctrine and an idealistic fix for perplexing challenges to the superior elite from below (Morris, 1995). Cultural participation and self-image are symbiotic of “the individual’s public identity” as “a consequence of the public reaction to the deviance”, rather than “a consequence of the inherent qualities of the deviant action” (Becker, 1963: 35). Rule-breakers gather, like “birds of a feather flocking together” (Elliott et al., 1979: 16), to create an alterative world, subculturally bounded by collective subjugation from conventionalist society. Normative archetypes of a retreatist social grouping reconcile an innovative version of belonging, “seeing through the present institutional set up” and “discarding the old traditions of respect for authority” as to neutralise an infinite pursuit of self-actualisation (Young, 2007: 4).

### **A consumer society, symbolic branding and the ‘chav’ identity**

The collective focus in a culture of consumption is “self definition through the purchase of goods” as “status differentials are based less on one’s role in the productive sphere than on one’s ability to consume” (Anderson and Wadkins, 1992: 149). An equality of opportunity is superficially existent in the contemporary marketplace, in that wealth and stature are earned rather than inherited (Corrigan, 1997). Yet, participation in the commercial economy is

negotiated in the nexus of social meaning, thereby institutionally omitting the lower orders from elite culture (Bocock, 2002). The propinquity between social relations and mode of production, as fortified an industrial modernity, is transfigured in a postmodernity of consumption (Crompton, 2008). A 'liquefaction of signs' is "an effacement of the distinction between high and mass culture", where "everything is social life can be said to have become cultural" (Jameson, 1984: 87). The falsity of a symbolically constructed reality destabilises the mechanical infrastructure of a traditionally assumed order, and is consequential in "a loss of stable meaning" to "a fascination with the endless flow of bizarre juxtapositions" (Featherstone, 1990: 7). Whilst consumption is by no means a novel phenomena, it was only in the immediate post-war epoch "that the desire and ability to consume ever further into the realms of luxury and technological gadgetry became part of everyday life" (Hall et al., 2008: 89).

A consumer society "uses images, signs and symbolic goods" to "summon up dreams, desires and fantasies which suggest romantic authenticity and emotional fulfilment" in an 'aesthetic hallucination of the real' (Featherstone, 1990: 19). The traditional proletariat is ostensibly endowed with an opportunity for self-reinvention by way of creative performance in the leisure market. Amidst fascination and enchantment with "the magic of style" is a promise "to lift us out of the dreariness of necessity" (Ewen, 1990: 30). The politics of identity, once defined by class-based roles in an industrially ordered society, is mapped through "the world of fashion" as a "backdrop for discussion of the economic effects and idiosyncratic characteristics of creative endeavours" (Santagata, 2004: 75). The creation of identity, as a display of consumer goods, has triumphed "over and above other more traditional modes of self-expression" (Hayward, 2004: 144). Cultural norms of postmodernity are constructed in a fantasy world of idealistic synchronisation, forging a social existence of artificial existence, in which "our pecuniary standing" is interpreted by stylistic consumption (Veblen, 1899/1975: 167). An autodidact self-consciousness is "in danger of being dismissed as vulgar and tasteless" by "those rich in cultural capital" (Featherstone, 1990: 12). Individuality perceived to transgress from beyond the normative boundaries of the elite culture is stigmatised as a deviant anomaly (Tomlinson, 1990); "An individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him, breaking the claim that his other attributes have on us." (Goffman, 1963: 15).

A 'chav' phenomenon of the twenty-first century "partakes of a social process" where "consumption practices now serve as the locus around which exclusion is configured" (Hayward and Yar, 2006: 24). Demarcated as "a white working class youth dressed in street ware clothing and jewellery", the 'chav' is a recapitulation of a British underclass "associated with vulgar taste, loutish and anti-social behaviour, teenager pregnancy and welfare dependency" (Le Grand, 2013: 3). As the manufacturing industry collapsed and traditional identity of a labouring generation was destabilised, working class youth came to symbolise a disobedient rebellion against a contemporary order of meritocratic entrepreneurship. Ousted from a service economy, politically disenfranchised and inept for participation in a conventional pursuit of leisure, the 'corner boy' takes "to the streets" in an attempt "to seize control of their lives" by "breaking the monotony of their woes" (Martin, 2009: 141). An existent narrative of the underclass as a self-inflicted consequence idleness posits the 'chav' as "humans who are deficient" and "lacking in what the rest of the population have in order to become good citizens" (McKenzie, 2015: 76). Britain, as "a less classless and more class-bound society", perpetuates an ascendant polarisation of life chance between the prosperous elite and a degenerating underclass, of whom are compelled to

“reside in a dark world of crime and drugs” (Devine, 1997: 202). The social paradoxes manifest in a ‘chav’ style is illustrative of “an attempt to resolve symbolically, or magically, concrete problems that now confront a post-industrial youth underclass” (Cohen and Ainley, 2000: 91). So called ‘chavs’ live a contradictory legacy of deindustrialisation through a subcultural acclimatisation of excessive consumption, whether “it be an excess of visible brand names, flesh piercing or tattoos” (Adams and Rainsborough, 2007: 93). The role of mockery in constructing “the moral-aesthetic boundaries” has “created avenues for the production of commodities that cater to the non-chav” (Le Grand, 2013: 227). An underclass of impoverished identity, expelled from the sphere of market-mediated consumption, are “recast as flawed consumers” and “left without a useful social function” (Bauman, 1998: 2).

### **Celebrity culture, popular mockery and a media crusade of shaming**

Mass communication as an elite production operates “to filter for the section, production and diffusion of information and entertainment” (Thompson, 1988: 363). A bureaucratic media formulates news production through “a systematic sorting and selecting of events according to a socially constructed set of categories”, as to “reproduce symbolically the existing structure of power” (Hall et al., 1978: 53). Originally a lexis native to Southern England as a Romani expression for ‘the child’, the ‘chav’ was paradoxically reconceptualised to depict “a workless Burberry-wearing underclass” (O. Jones, 2011: viii). Docketed as ‘buzzword of the year’ in 2004, the branding was expeditiously circulated athwart the mediated world to become an institutionally recognised menace (Le Grand, 2013). British media was peculiarly eager to publicise “how the working class and the non-working class spend their money, chose their cloth, how and what they eat, and how they speak” (McKenzie, 2015: 104). The ‘chav’ lifestyle was to be ridiculed in a broadcast narrative of misinformed exaggeration for the mere purpose of entertainment (Mason and Wigley, 2013); “We laugh at their faux pas and share our disgust at their shameless promiscuity, their tasteless lifestyles, parental incompetence and bigotry” (Tyler and Bennett, 2010: 387).

‘Chav-spotting’ is a cultural apparatus of the neo-liberalist elite to safeguard an existence of prosperity by exploitation of a shamed underclass, figuratively coalesced with criminogenic imagery of the ‘ASBO ridden’ council estate (Bennett, 2013). The classed nature of ‘chav’ persona is perceptively bounded to an ideology of responsabilisation, where “marginalisation of the working class is presented as the result of individual moral failings” (Le Grand, 2013: 223). A virtualised ‘chav-hate’, articulated by means of technological communication and social mediated realism, violates a rudimentary standard of human dignity in an abhorrent version of the underclass as subhuman (O. Jones, 2011); “Humanoid in appearance, but primitive in nature, chavs are fast becoming the bane of humanity. Now all but classified as a completely separate species, chav took left fork of the road of evolution when everybody else went right. The chav is like a wild beast. The chav is commonly found in packs hunting on the open plains of the council estate.” (cited in Hayward and Yar, 2006: 17). Arising from a propagandised shaming culture is a ‘social racism’, of which is neutralised in an authoritative consensus of intolerance (Burchill, 2005). The underclass as a social product of elitist contempt “serves to project all that is bad and immoral onto the other”, whilst “reciprocally enhancing and confirming the goodness, self-regard and status of one’s own grouping” (Webster, 2008: 294). Coalesced with symbolic

imagery of “the baseball caps, the Mr. T jewellery, trackies bottoms and trainers” (Wallace and Spanner, 2004: 11), the ‘chav’ is a postmodern incarnation of ‘folk devil’.

Celebrity culture, as modulated by figurative representation in the news media of “TV series, newspapers and gossip magazines”, is the contemporary “means by which reactionary class attitudes, allegiances and judgements are communicated” (Tyler and Bennett, 2009: 375). A celebritisation of society is characteristic of a hierarchical struggle over self worth and meaning of cultural position. ‘Chavtainment’ of reality newscast has “reinforced the mainstream view of working class individuals as bigoted, slothful, aggressive people”, and appropriated gender typecasts (O. Jones, 2011: 122). The celebrity ‘chav’ is a repository of “negative value and bad taste”, offering entertainment for a peripheral audience of unparalleled being (Skeggs, 2001: 298). Representations of the ‘chavette’ have been “diffused in popular culture via the British TV series Little Britain”, with the caricature of Vicky Pollard becoming “a public face for the ‘chav’ phenomenon” (Le Grand, 2013: 229). An expressing facet of the celebrity ‘chavette’ is ineptitude of femininity and young motherhood, perhaps opted into as a pecuniary choice of state dependence (Adams and Rainsborough, 2007; Tyler 2008). ITV production of ‘The Jeremy Kyle Show’ commodifies the underclass as “daytime entertainment fodder”, popularly depicting “those at the bottom of the pile in British society as little more than animals” (O. Jones, 2011: 127). Symbolic representation of character propagates “images of in-control bodies associated with moral rectitude and civility” and “out-of-control bodies linked to their converse” (Adams and Rainsborough, 2007: 404). Postmodern quandary of the British underclass “finds its ideological mode of articulation by attributing individual cultural choices” to “what can in fact be seen as the outcome of a cruel capitalist perversity” (Hayward and Yar, 2006: 25). Demonisation of a ‘chav’ identity is “the flagrant triumphalism of the rich, who, no longer challenged by those below, instead point and laugh at them” (McKenzie, 2015: 269). A working class identity is “no longer something people feel they could wear with pride” (O. Jones, 2011: ix).

### Conclusions

The politicisation of a ‘chav’ underclass in the twenty-first century is an exploitative apparatus of moral control and boundary reinforcement. Lower orders of society are scapegoated to divert a blame culture away from the constitutional order. Powerless to defend themselves against a popular onslaught of media stigma and authoritative jurisdiction, the ‘chav’ internalises the prescribed societal label in a perplexed self-fulfilling prophecy of oppression and subversion. A self-circulating existence of deviancy amplification and ineptitude of escape offers little alternative but to either accept ‘their lot in life’ or pursue a substitute mode of reality.

Subcultural identity instils all that the parent culture is absent in giving. The ‘chav’ discovers existential purpose of being in a gathering of alike persons. To participate in a symbolic performance of consumption is perhaps not necessarily an expression of the retreatist self per se, but a conformity to what is expected by cultural definition. Does a ‘chav’ venture out to purchase faux Burberry and an Adidas tracksuit as to intentionally offend an elite sentimentality? Or does he do so in accordance with his fellows as to captivate belonging?

By definition, the 'chav' is a menace to society and a threat to morality. In a cruel fated irony, it is perhaps an institutionalised outlawing of sub-criminal transgression by means of ostensibly civil sanction that ultimately perpetuates assumption of criminogenic progression. It is easy to caricature social complexes of the unfamiliar, of which to many the 'chav' is. An ascendancy of popular tolerance is a principled necessity to challenge the stereotype and interrupt a generational sequence of political disenfranchisement. To propagandise an underclass is to preserve an 'us' verses 'them' nexus. Blaming the poor for their own misfortune is a counterproductive logic, in that a shaming ideology thwarts integration efforts into a productive society. The 'chav' lives a demonised existence of state dependence and worklessness at the taxpaying expense of the demoniser.

If such outward expression of prejudice and bigotry were to be levelled at a social grouping on the grounds of racialised or gender identity, the perpetrating wrongdoer would not only be criminally sanctioned, but almost universally vilified. Then, why is class hatred tolerated as a leisurely pastime in an apparently democratic society?

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