3.5 CLASS INEQUALITY (1985: Q210 a–c)
by country

	Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Austria	Italy
A person whose parents are rich has a better chance of earning a lot of money than a person whose parents are poor	%	%	%	%	%	%
Agree strongly	29	30	28	23	41	36
Agree	43	37	40	47	33	36
Neither agree nor disagree	13	12	12	18	15	13
Disagree	13	17	16	10	9	11
Disagree strongly	2	3	4	3	3	4
A person whose father is a professional person has a better chance of earning a lot of money than a person whose parents are poor						
Agree strongly	22	19	25	18	40	34
Agree	46	33	39	45	34	37
Neither agree nor disagree	16	19	13	19	13	13
Disagree	14	25	19	14	10	12
Disagree strongly	2	4	5	4	3	5
In [country] what you achieve in life depends largely on your family background						
Agree strongly	17	11	9	8	21	22
Agree	36	20	27	27	30	41
Neither agree nor disagree	18	20	20	29	26	21
Disagree	26	41	35	28	19	13
Disagree strongly	4	8	10	7	3	3
BASE: Unweighted	1528	677	1528	1068	987	1680

4 Inequality and welfare

*Tom W. Smith**

This chapter explores comparative attitudes to inequality and to the related issue of what sorts of measures should be adopted to protect the most vulnerable in society. Some forms of vulnerability are universal: for instance, no-one is immune from illness, and none can escape old age. So an element of self-interest certainly exists when it comes to supporting policies and programmes that provide basic health care for the sick and a decent standard of living for the elderly.

But support for welfare provision in general may also have much to do with perceptions of – and attitudes towards – inequality. Even to someone who is reasonably well-off, concern for the fact that many others live in poverty may lead that person to support redistributive policies. The greater the concern, perhaps, the stronger will be the support for such policies. Conversely, someone who is unaware of or indifferent to inequality, or feels that the poor have only themselves to blame, may be predisposed against any state intervention that aimed to redistribute wealth. The 1987 ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) questionnaire module was designed explicitly to address these sorts of issues.

All the countries we investigate – indeed all industrialised nations – have a number of government programmes intended to protect their citizens from the difficulties caused by, for example, illness and unemployment. Indeed this protection has come to be regarded as a fundamental right of citizenship – an entitlement that society owes to all its members (Marshall, 1963; Mann, 1986). Nonetheless, nations differ greatly not only in the way they structure and administer their welfare programmes, but also in the

*Co-director of the General Social Survey, National Opinion Research Center (NORC), University of Chicago.

breadth and generosity of their provision. For example, whereas in the mid-1980s Italy devoted 28 per cent of its GDP to such programmes, the equivalent figure for Australia and the USA was only 17 per cent.[1] To simplify an exceedingly complex picture, we shall divide our seven nations into three groups according to their political structures. The first, represented only by Hungary, is communist or state socialist. The second, represented by Britain, Italy, the Netherlands and West Germany (all countries with mixed economies and developed welfare programmes), can be called social democracies. The third, consisting of Australia and the USA, both of which have much more limited state welfare provision, we label capitalist (sometimes called liberal) democracies.

Communist countries exercise centralised governmental control over their economies, and most people are employed by state-owned industries. Through government programmes and through benefits provided by public employers, communist states have created comprehensive welfare systems which have placed such services as health care and education entirely within the public sector. While the social democracies of Western Europe also have wide-ranging 'cradle-to-grave' welfare systems that cover many aspects of life, most jobs remain in the private sector and the public sector does not monopolise all social services. Finally, in the capitalist democracies of the USA and Australia, almost all industrial and commercial employment is in the private sector and its citizens' welfare is served by a combination of private and public programmes.[2]

These different economic models have developed for a complex set of historical reasons (Flora and Heidenheimer, 1981; Mommsen, 1981; Tomasson, 1983; Jansson, 1988). Our two capitalist democracies are both new nations, former frontier societies peopled by a diverse mix of immigrants. Although they are extensions of Western society in general and British society in particular, the USA and Australia also represent new beginnings – self-made nations that 'grew up' democratic and capitalist. They have been less constrained by the monarchical and feudal traditions of Europe than their mother countries of the Old World. The social democracies of Western Europe developed not from the middle classes, as the capitalist democracies did, but from the top and bottom. In part the welfare state came from the top – both from a feudalistic sense of *noblesse oblige* and from a *real-politik* attempt to bribe the working class, and from the bottom, as the working class organised itself into labour movements and socialist parties, which challenged both the landed classes and emergent industrialists for political and economic power. They pressed for the welfare state both to secure material protection and benefits for their class and to promote their sense of a just society. In contrast, communist nations developed from the bottom, the top having been overthrown by social revolutions or military occupations and then eliminated by redistributive and collectivist policies and stringent, centralised party control.

These different political economies have developed from different historical dynamics. Nonetheless, they exhibit themselves today through differences in the policy preferences and ideologies of their citizens.[3] In part this is because the system that evolved in each country reflects the wishes of its citizens. In part, citizens in each system have come to expect, and accept as natural, the welfare programmes offered.

So in the first part of this chapter we examine similarities and differences between countries in their public attitudes towards the welfare state, focusing first on the level of public sympathy for social welfare benefits. Then we assess the public's willingness to finance such welfare benefits through taxation, asking how far taxation itself is seen as an appropriate instrument for achieving greater redistribution. We look at possible reasons for differences between nations in support for the welfare state. Are they associated with the degree of perceived inequality, with perceptions of one's own social mobility, or perhaps with optimism about one's own economic prospects? Do beliefs about 'getting ahead in life' help to explain attitudes towards the welfare state? In particular, do people in some nations believe that opportunities depend primarily on family and class origins, while those in other countries believe they depend primarily on individual initiative? And are some concerned more about inequality of outcomes than about equality of opportunity?

In the second part of this chapter, we concentrate on the theme of social inequality. Is it seen as serving a useful purpose (as perhaps spurring on individual effort or as a prerequisite of general prosperity), or is it merely a product of the prevailing class or economic system? We also discover whether or not perceived levels of class conflict vary between nations. Finally, we examine the relationship between class (income level, occupational status and education) and a broad range of attitudes (for instance, towards welfare programmes, taxation and redistribution, opportunities for getting ahead, and class conflict) and consider whether cross-national differences in these relationships help to explain cross-national differences in general beliefs about social inequality.

Support for welfare programmes

The five questions we asked on this theme covered a range of welfare policies, from providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed to the more general issue of whether more should be spent on benefits for the poor. The picture is clear. Public support for welfare spending is highest among the Hungarians (average of nearly 80 per cent), followed closely by the Italians and – rather less enthusiastically – by the citizens of the other three social democracies of West Germany, Britain and the Netherlands. But as the summary table below shows, it is the gap between the social democracies and those countries we have termed capitalist democracies that is the widest. In general, these differences in preferences match the actual levels of social welfare benefits and programmes provided in each nation. Intriguingly then, support for welfare provision in the European social democracies is much closer to that in Hungary than to that in the culturally similar nations of Australia and the USA.

	Average over five 'welfarist' items*	Strongly agree/agree that the government should . . . provide everyone with a guaranteed basic income	. . . spend more on benefits for the poor
Hungary	79%	78%	72%
Italy	76%	67%	83%
West Germany	64%	51%	80%
Britain	63%	59%	82%
Netherlands	60%	48%	55%
Australia	42%	36%	59%
USA	38%	20%	58%

Note. *The five items were 'reduce differences' in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes'; 'provide a job for everyone who wants one'; 'spend less on benefits for the poor' (strongly *dis*agree/*dis*agree); 'provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed'; and 'provide everyone with a guaranteed basic income'.

Full details are given in **Table 4.1**.

Differences are greatest for the 'levelling' items (income redistribution and a guaranteed income or wage). For example, while nearly 80 per cent of Hungarians support a minimum income for all, this is favoured by only 20 per cent of Americans. The European social democratic norm is around 50 per cent. Differences, while still marked, tend to be smaller for items to do with government action to help the needy or dependent. So spending more on benefits for the poor is supported by over 80 per cent of Italians and around 60 per cent of Americans and Australians. Naturally, support will depend in part on what is already provided in each country. This may explain why the Dutch are the least supportive of more spending on the poor and why it is also the least popular of the five items among the Hungarians: government expenditure on the poor is already rather high in both these countries.

In brief, the tripartite division into communist, social democratic and capitalist democratic nations explains many of the cross-national differences in preferences for the welfare state. Nations with the strongest public demand for various social welfare programmes are the most likely to have such programmes. Partly this indicates that people tend to accept the types of governmental measures they already have, but we feel it also indicates that where social welfare measures exist, they do so because of public demand.

On one aspect of egalitarianism, however, there is something close to a consensus across the seven nations (see also Haller, Moshammer and Raubel, 1987). This is the issue of government support for children from poor families to go on to higher education. As the table below shows, people in different nations certainly differ somewhat in the *strength* of their support, but few in any country disagree with the proposition. The percentage favouring such a policy ranges from around 70 per cent (Australia) to nearly 90 per cent (Italy).

% strongly agreeing/agreeing	The government should provide more chances for children from poor families to go to university
Italy	89%
West Germany	84%
Netherlands	84%
Britain	83%
USA	75%
Hungary	72%
Australia	71%

Moreover the expected ordering of countries (communist, social democratic and capitalist democratic) does not conform on the issue of educational opportunity as it did on the other items. The USA is close to the middle of the range and Hungary is towards the lower end. Indeed, Americans and Australians are more supportive of government action for educational opportunity than they are for any of the other welfare measures and by a much wider margin (on average +38 percentage points in the USA and +29 percentage points in Australia), than in the social democracies (+13 to +24 percentage points) or in our lone communist state (−7 percentage points).

Why should this be so? A likely explanation is the existence of what has been called the 'opportunity ideology' in the USA (Smith, 1987). Educational programmes are, *par excellence*, a means of promoting equality of *opportunity* rather than equality of *outcomes*. Education is a route to upward mobility, not a means of redistribution.' Indeed over a range of issues, many Americans believe not only that equality means equal opportunity, but also that attempts to eliminate (or even reduce) inequalities in living standards are themselves inequitable (Rasinski, 1987).

Taxation and redistribution

Sharing the tax burden

We then went on to ask about attitudes to the levels of taxation necessary to finance government welfare programmes (although the question wording did not explicitly link the one concept with the other). Here too we found cross-national variations, but not nearly as marked as when we asked about welfare policies. On average, across the seven countries, the proportion of people saying that the taxes of those with high, middle, and low incomes are too high is about the same. (The exception is Hungary where direct taxation is a fairly recent phenomenon and still low by Western standards.) In none of the countries does more than about one in three feel that the rich are too highly taxed; indeed, except in Australia, fewer than a quarter are of this opinion.

Taxation is much too high/too high for those . . .

	a . . . with high incomes	b . . . with middle incomes	c . . . with low incomes	Difference c − b
West Germany	12%	49%	80%	31%
Hungary	17%	34%	53%	19%
USA	17%	68%	67%	−1%
Italy	18%	61%	84%	23%
Britain	24%	40%	85%	45%
Netherlands	25%	57%	76%	19%
Australia	34%	59%	69%	10%

Similarly, a majority in each country agrees that those with low incomes are paying too much in taxes. When comparing the public's perceptions of the tax burden of those with high and low incomes, all nations appear to be rather progressive and pro-levelling, although the percentage believing that the poor bear a greater tax burden than the rich ranges from +68 percentage points in West Germany to +35 percentage points in Australia. This also suggests widespread support across all the nations for a 'soak-the-rich' taxation strategy to finance desired welfare programmes.

Examination of the figures on taxing the middle class shows however that there are strong national differences that are related to political system. America emerges as especially concerned about the tax burden of the middle class. Only in America are the taxes of those with middle incomes rated as more burdensome than the taxes of those with high incomes. The Australians alone come close to sharing this belief. Davis (1986) noted that "America is a pious middle-class nation, while Britain is a secular working-class one". To some extent this characterisation of the British applies to the other European social democracies too. There is little evidence of a widespread middle-class tax revolt that might jeopardise the sorts of government welfare programmes that have been seen to command widespread support among the citizens of the social democracies. In Britain concern about the direct tax burden shouldered by the middle income groups is notably muted in comparison both with the (relatively) low-taxed Americans and with their more highly-taxed Western European neighbours (Taylor-Gooby, 1987). On the other hand, the present British government has recently lowered tax rates for the well-off and public opinion can hardly have failed to notice.

There is however further evidence to suggest that – to a greater or lesser extent – people in all seven countries believe that high earners can and should bear more of the tax burden. A certain measure of self-interest is at play here: higher taxes for those on high incomes can lead to lower taxes for the rest, although in practice the extent to which taxing high earners more would reduce the burden on others is, of course, strictly limited.

Progressive taxation and redistribution

Respondents were asked whether "people with high incomes should pay a larger share of their income in taxes than those with low incomes, the same share or a smaller share". A second question invited them to agree or disagree that "it is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes".

In contrast to responses to the question about taxation *levels*, there seems to be something approaching a consensus when we asked specifically about *progressive* taxation. About two-thirds to three-quarters of respondents in all nations agreed that high income earners should be taxed more heavily than those on low incomes. Support is a bit weaker in the capitalist democracies, but not markedly so (about ten percentage points lower). The sharp differences that appear over support for welfare measures among the capitalist democratic, social democratic and communist nations are muted on the issue of progressive taxation, but they re-emerge over the question of income *redistribution*.

	Supports progressive taxation	Favours government action to reduce income differences
Italy	77%	81%
Britain	75%	63%
West Germany	73%	56%
Netherlands	70%	64%
Hungary	69%	77%
USA	64%	28%
Australia	63%	42%

Where people in the capitalist democracies differ from their counterparts in Western Europe (and in Hungary) is apparently on the desirability of using the taxes of the rich explicitly to redistribute income. Yet again Americans and Australians emerge as notably more hostile to government programmes designed to promote greater equality of outcomes. And on these figures, yet again Britain remains firmly within the Western European social democratic 'camp' – despite the ideology of Britain's current governing party.

Perceptions of inequality and social mobility

One of the reasons that people in the capitalist democracies of the USA and Australia are less enamoured of welfare programmes is that they see current conditions as being already more equitable than do the citizens of other countries. While around three in five Americans and Australians agree that income differences are too large, this belief is shared by many more of those living in the social democracies and in Hungary.

	Strongly agree/agree that income differences are too large
Italy	86%
Britain	75%
Hungary	74%
West Germany	72%
Netherlands	66%
Australia	58%
USA	56%

Moreover, individual Americans (and, to a lesser extent, Australians) are rather more inclined to rate themselves as near the top of the social structure than are individuals in other countries. Respondents in all seven nations were asked to place themselves on one of ten 'rungs of a ladder' representing different positions in the social structure. While 18 per cent of Americans see themselves as on one of the top three rungs, 10 per cent or fewer of people in the West European democracies rank themselves thus.[4] The differences are, however, less marked than many discussed in this chapter.

		Top three rungs	Fourth to seventh rung	Eighth to tenth rung
USA	%	18	72	10
Australia	%	10	84	6
Italy	%	10	84	7
West Germany	%	10	81	9
Britain	%	8	75	17
Hungary	%	3	74	24

It may not be surprising that such a high proportion of the British place themselves near the bottom of the social structure, compared with their more prosperous Western European neighbours. Only Hungarians are less likely than the British to place themselves at the top and more likely to place themselves at the bottom.

Citizens of the USA and Australia are also much more optimistic about their *own* chances of becoming more prosperous than are those of any other nationality. Americans are considerably out in front with 71 per cent agreeing that "people like me and my family have a good chance of improving our standard of living". Only Australians even begin to approach the American figure, while the Europeans (conspicuously the Dutch) are markedly less confident (see the table below). While responses may partly reflect the short-term economic prospects in each country, this question probably also taps deeper and more enduring feelings about personal opportunity – a throwback perhaps to the frontier spirit, the popular notion of the USA as the 'land of opportunity'.

But the optimism of the Americans and (to a lesser extent) of the Australians does not seem to be based on past experience of greater upward mobility: the proportion of Americans and Australians reporting that their own job is better than their father's does not differ much from that of citizens of other countries.

	Strongly agree/agree that people like me have good chance of improving standard of living	Level of own job much higher/ higher than father's
USA	71%	47%
Australia	58%	46%
Italy	43%	37%
West Germany	36%	25%
Britain	36%	47%
Hungary	33%	57%
Netherlands	23%	43%

As we can see, five of the seven countries report an 'upward mobility rate' in the range of 37 to 47 per cent; only the West Germans and the Hungarians deviate from the norm. This finding echoes those of many more detailed studies of actual (as opposed to reported) comparative mobility (for example, Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero, 1982; Ganzeboom, Luijkx and Treiman, 1988). In particular, the oft-told tale of American fluidity and British rigidity appears to be fiction rather than fact. So it seems we cannot look to differences in levels of intergenerational mobility as an explanation for the greater opposition in the capitalist democracies to egalitarianism and social welfare policies.

Beliefs about opportunity and mobility

Do cross-national differences in what we have called the 'ideology of opportunity' help to explain support for – or hostility towards – welfare programmes? In particular, do *beliefs* about the kinds of opportunities that society provides for self-advancement, and the factors influencing these opportunities, differ across nations even if the perceived *degree* of opportunity does not? Other studies have indicated that Americans are less likely to see intergenerational mobility as dependent upon family background than are the British, West Germans, Austrians or Italians (Haller and Hoellinger, 1986; Smith, 1987). Do Americans therefore regard their own upward mobility as stemming from the greater openness of their society, while Europeans believe that success in life is in some degree influenced by a person's class origins?

However, as the table below shows, people in all countries tend to agree on which factors are most important for "getting ahead in life". Moreover, such differences as do occur do not generally follow the communist/social democratic/capitalist democratic pattern observed so far.

Factors influencing "getting ahead in life" (rank orders)

	Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Hungary
Hard work	1	1	2	4	2	4	3
Ambition	3	2	1	2	3	6	1
Good education	2	3	3	1	1	1	5
Natural ability	4	4	4	5	4	3	2
Knowing right people	5	5	5	3	5	2	4
Well-educated parents	6	6	6	6	6	7	8
Wealthy family	7	7	7	7	7	8	6
Political connections	11	8	8	9	8	5	7
Race	8	9	9	8	9	13	n/a
Gender	9	10	10	10	11	11	10
Religion	12	11	11	12	10	10	11
Political beliefs	13	12	13	11	12	9	9
Part of the country	10	13	12	13	13	12	12

Notes: Percentages for each country are shown in Table 4.2. Race was not asked about on the Hungarian questionnaire.

People in all seven industrial nations tend to rank personal characteristics such as hard work, ambition, natural ability and education as the most important. Next, typically, comes "knowing the right people". This is usually followed by parentally-transmitted characteristics of wealth and education. Rated least important (usually) are ascribed characteristics such as race, sex, religion, and region of origin and political factors (connections and beliefs).

The English-speaking nations (Britain, the USA and Australia) are especially close in their ranking of achievement factors, with only minor differences in both ranking and absolute levels. West Germany and the Netherlands also closely resemble one another and differ from the English-speaking nations primarily in ranking one's education a little higher than personality attributes. It may be that, in West Germany and the Netherlands, education is seen as certifying one's personal ability, or that it is viewed as the mechanism through which individuals turn their personal ability into achievement. Italy differs in giving more weight to connections: "knowing the right people" (ranked second) and to political connections (ranked fifth) than does any of the other nations, while the personal characteristics of hard work and ambition are seen as less important. Hungary is distinguished by the relatively low emphasis on education (Braun and Kolosi, 1988).*

Likewise, while the *relative* ranking of political connections and political beliefs is only a bit higher in Hungary, their *absolute* levels are well above those of other nations (see **Table 4.2**). This would seem to reflect the pervasive role of the Communist Party (at least in 1987 when we asked the questions) in social and economic life.

*However this is far from saying that Hungarians disparage education *per se*: we have already seen that over 70 per cent support greater opportunities for children of poor parents to go on to higher education.

While the Hungarian pattern shows the importance of a country's political system in shaping beliefs about opportunity, overall cross-national differences in beliefs about opportunity and mobility are small, and appear to be governed more by cultural patterns than by government structure and political ideology.

Explanations of inequality

Similarities between the nations are even greater when we asked respondents to agree or disagree with various possible justifications of inequality. They were asked to agree or disagree with eight possible explanations, which we subsequently grouped and labelled as 'financial incentives', 'class conflict' and 'promotion of general prosperity'. As a convenient way of summarising the data, average percentages were calculated for each of the three groups.

First, we found that there is a majority belief in all countries bar one that pay inequalities serve an important purpose in that, without rewards, people would neither work so hard nor acquire the skills and education needed for technical and professional occupations. As the table below shows, on average, between around 60 and 80 per cent of the public in six of the seven countries believes consistently that at least some pay differences are needed to stimulate the development of human capital, hard work and the assumption of responsibilities.

	Strongly agree/agree that financial incentives are needed if people are ...				
	Average	... to work hard	... to take extra responsibility	... to get skills and qualifications	... to study for a vocation
Australia	79%	72%	82%	81%	81%
West Germany	73%	69%	64%	74%	85%
Britain	70%	61%	82%	69%	69%
Italy	68%	54%	77%	73%	67%
USA	66%	68%	70%	57%	68%
Hungary	62%	70%	60%	61%	55%
Netherlands	46%	36%	64%	43%	42%

Only the Netherlands is a notable outlier, its citizens being much less likely to believe that pay differentials are a necessary incentive to work and to get ahead.

In order to explore further how different nations explained their inequalities, we asked about the role of class and vested interests in perpetuating inequality. We find that, of the three explanations of social inequality, class conflict is next most popular. These are the responses to two propositions that we put to respondents:

	Average	Strongly agree/agree that inequality continues to exist because ... ... it benefits the rich and powerful	... ordinary people don't join together to get rid of it
Italy	67%	74%	61%
West Germany	52%	63%	40%
Netherlands	51%	58%	45%
Britain	49%	59%	40%
USA	44%	46%	42%
Australia	44%	55%	32%
Hungary	32%	36%	28%

In most countries, an average of between 44–52 per cent agree that inequality is perpetuated because it benefits the rich and powerful and because ordinary people have not organised to eliminate it. The outliers are Hungary and Italy, Hungarians being the least likely to see class conflict as an explanation for inequality and the Italians the most likely to express this belief. The other Western European social democracies cluster closely together, their averages ranging between 49 per cent and 52 per cent. And the Dutch agree with the class interest explanation more than with the personal incentive explanation (at 51 per cent *versus* 46 per cent respectively). Predictably (in view of our previous findings) a majority of Americans rejects the two propositions. But perhaps among the most surprising of our findings are the answers given to these questions in Hungary. Both statements are, after all, predicated on a 'Marxist' view of the world, and both are decisively rejected.

We also wanted to discover whether a measure of economic inequality within society was seen as necessary for promoting *general*, as opposed to individual, economic success. The results are shown in the table below.

	Average	Strongly agree/agree that ... ... large differences in income are necessary for national prosperity	... allowing businesses to make good profits is best way to improve everyone's standard of living
Australia	41%	28%	53%
Britain	40%	26%	53%
USA	39%	31%	46%
Hungary	39%	25%	54%
Italy	37%	18%	57%
West Germany	32%	24%	40%
Netherlands	24%	16%	31%

So, of the three general explanations of inequality (incentives, class conflict and the promotion of economic prosperity) the latter is clearly the least popular, with typically an average of only 33–41 per cent endorsing the two propositions which come under this heading. Once again the Dutch are outliers, being less likely to endorse this factor than citizens of the other six countries. However, the Netherlands does follow most other nations in endorsing general prosperity less frequently than financial incentives and class conflicts. The Hungarians alone endorse the general economic good more frequently than class interests as an explanation for the existence of inequality.

It may be of interest that decisive majorities in five of the seven countries fail to support the view that *large* differences in income are necessary for national prosperity. (It may well be that the word 'large' put people off.) And Hungary is the most enthusiastic about business profits, with Britain not far behind. For full details, see **Table 4.3.**

As in the earlier examination of the factors that are most important for getting ahead in life, there is more agreement than disagreement among the nations on the reasons for inequality. This suggests that beliefs about inequality are to a large degree shaped by pan-cultural forces. Among these forces the two most likely are their common Western cultural heritage and their status as industrialised nations. Moreover, the national differences that do emerge do not closely follow communist, social democratic and capitalist democratic lines. Instead they seem to reflect individual national variations, resulting from either particular historical developments or differences in current economic and social conditions.

Assessments of social conflict

To what extent are social divisions seen as serious conflicts within each of the seven nations? We asked about five pairs of social groups: poor people and rich people; the working class and the middle class; the unemployed and people with jobs*; management and workers; farmers and city people. We were interested in the extent to which views on income inequality were related to perceived conflict between structured social groups; and also in whether support for a stronger government role in combatting inequality was associated with feelings that there was a collective dimension to social conflict.

	Average	Perceiving very strong/strong conflicts between ... ...poor and rich	...management and workers	...unemployed and people with jobs	...farmers and city people	...working class and middle class
Netherlands	49%	77%	68%	48%	32%	22%
Italy	47%	59%	51%	57%	24%	45%
USA	43%	59%	53%	46%	36%	20%
Australia	40%	43%	51%	46%	42%	18%
Hungary	40%†	54%	41%	n/a	26%	37%
Britain	38%	52%	54%	39%	26%	20%
West Germany	30%	36%	52%	36%	11%	13%

Note. † Excluding '...unemployed and people with jobs'.

*This question was omitted on the Hungarian questionnaire since unemployment does not exist in the same form as in the other nations.

Full details are given in **Table 4.4**.

Once again we find that there is more cross-national agreement than disagreement, in that the seven nations generally report similar levels of social conflict overall. The West Germans are the least likely to perceive divisions, the Italians and Dutch the most likely, but these differences are not great.

Moreover, with few exceptions, such conflicts as *are* thought to exist are not perceived as strong. Even so, very few citizens of any country believe that *no* divisions exist between the groups we nominated. The pattern that emerges is that people across the nations perceive greater conflict between economic groups than between explicitly mentioned social classes or between farmers and city dwellers. The conflicts between the poor and the rich, and between management and workers, are seen to be the strongest, those between the unemployed and people with jobs come second or third, while class and rural/urban conflicts come fourth or fifth (again see **Table 4.4**).

However, the perception of greater conflict between income groups and work hierarchies than between classes probably does not indicate that these are more important or salient social dividers than class. It may merely reflect the fact that the social distance between the former two groups (rich *versus* poor and managers *versus* employees) is seen as greater than the distance between the middle and working classes. If the class terms had been widened (for example, upper *versus* lower class) or if the economic terms had been narrowed (for example, average income *versus* lower than average income), we suspect that the levels of perceived conflict would have been similar for class and economic groups.

There are a few notable differences between countries. For instance, the West Germans are conspicuous in denying class conflicts; the Dutch are particularly likely to see conflicts between the poor and the rich; the Italians are especially prone to see poverty and unemployment as divisive. And there are some cross-national differences in perceptions of conflict between farmers and city-dwellers, an issue that may become more salient with the growth of 'green' movements worldwide.

In any event there seems to be no general pattern which explains the country-by-country differences in rankings of conflict. But these differences are not great and, where they exist, they may well merely reflect the particular socio-economic conditions in each nation, such as the level of unemployment, the size and condition of the farm sector, and so on.

Inequality and class

Having examined how the nations differ on attitudes towards the welfare state and social inequality, we next consider the class basis for these attitudes within each nation. We took three measures of socio-economic status (household income, occupation and education) and looked at the extent to which they were associated with attitudes. (We shall use the term 'class' loosely to cover these measures.) Detailed figures are shown in **Table 4.5**.

Overall, we see that in all countries class *is* related to support for the welfare state and to beliefs about equality. Of the 126 associations measured, all but three are positive. Moreover, in just over three quarters of the cases, the relationships are statistically significant. On the other hand, except for a few variables and a few countries, the relationships are not particularly strong. So we find that class is consistently related to attitudes towards social welfare and inequality, but that the relationship is generally modest.

The associations with social class tend to be strongest in relation to support for social welfare policies and levelling, and weakest for helping the poor to go to university and for progressive taxation. As a general rule, the association with class tends to be greater for variables that showed the larger cross-national differences in terms of the various countries' prevailing political ideologies (for example, social welfare programmes and income redistribution) and the degree of perceived income inequality in each. It tends to be lower for those variables that showed a greater measure of cross-national agreement (for example, progressive taxation and helping the poor to attend university). On these issues, not only does a degree of *cross-national* consensus exist, but also there is a fair degree of interclass consensus *within nations*.

Modest to moderate differences also appear when we look at associations between class and explanations for existing social inequality. Those in the lower classes are more likely than those in the upper classes to attribute inequality to class divisions. These differences are, however, altogether less striking than the ones noted earlier (again see **Table 4.5**).

To summarise, class differences appear on a number of social welfare and social inequality items. As the table below shows, on average these differences are quite similar across nations both in terms of their absolute values and in the pattern of associations across variables.[6]

	Average degree of association (gamma)*
Netherlands	+.201
Britain	+.193
United States	+.175
Australia	+.150
Italy	+.147
West Germany	+.133

Notes. * .000 indicates no relationship; 1.00 indicates a perfect relationship. An explanation of this measure of association is given in note 7 at the end of this chapter.

These averages are rather close to one another. Moreover, they do not differ much according to the political system operating in each country. Cross-national variations are not explained by the different class structures of the various countries. In particular, the greater support in the social democracies than in the capitalist democracies for more benefits and redistribution is not the result of a radicalised working class in the former which demands more than a passive working class does in the latter. True, the working classes in the social democracies *are* more in favour of such

measures than their counterparts in the capitalist democracies. But it is also the case that the *middle classes* in the social democracies are more supportive of welfare and egalitarian measures than are the middle classes in the capitalist democracies, and that this 'class gap' is virtually identical under both political systems. There are indeed differences *within* nations, but these tend to be fairly constant in size; variations *between* nations seem to be related to something other than the 'objective' class structure. So class differences between nations are not a likely explanation for cross-national variations in attitudes towards the welfare state and social inequality.

Conclusions

We have found that cross-national differences in popular preferences for welfare policies in general, and levelling programmes in particular, are large. Respondents in the study's one communist nation, Hungary, overwhelmingly favour the full gamut of welfare policies. Support in the social democracies of Western Europe is lower, but still substantial. In the capitalist (or liberal) democracies of the USA and Australia, support is lower still, with majorities failing to endorse programmes such as these. Part of the explanation is that people in the capitalist democracies are more inclined to believe that income gaps in their nations are smaller, that their own relative social position is higher, and that their chances for future advancement are greater than do citizens of the social democracies and of Hungary. However, this egalitarian optimism does not (as has often been suggested) appear to result from higher rates of individual upward mobility in the recent past. Rather it is the *evaluation* of inequality – how unfair it is felt to be and whether government is seen as an appropriate redistributive agent – that varies enormously between nations.

Moreover, the lower level of support among Americans for redistributive measures, and the relatively greater enthusiasm for measures that allow scope for individual opportunity, suggest that an ideology of opportunity plays a key role. Australians also (to a slightly smaller degree) appear to conform to this pattern. Given their similarities as 'pioneering' and 'immigrant' nations, one might wonder whether the experience of nation-building, or the influx of immigrants in search of a better life (or both), might have helped to create an enduring ethos of 'individualism'. In contrast, citizens of Hungary and of the European social democracies are more supportive of an egalitarian ideology, and of government programmes designed to lessen inequality and provide for some at least of the citizen's basic needs. Not surprisingly, we have also found that those nations with well-established welfare states are more in favour of welfare state provision. In that sense we are all products of our experience.

Despite their decidedly different stances on welfare policies, the citizens of the seven nations have very similar *perceptions* of social inequality. Such national differences as do exist are not strongly related to the various countries' political systems. Personal qualities such as hard work, rather than family position or ascribed attributes, are widely seen as important for personal advancement – although Hungarians and Italians (the latter the most pro-welfare in the social democracies) both give relatively greater

weight to personal and political connections than do people in the other nations.

Similar proportions of respondents in most countries also endorse the various *explanations* of social inequality. Majorities in each believe that incentives are needed to stimulate human capital development and personal productivity; substantial numbers in each believe that the 'haves' are keen to maintain the differences that operate to their advantage; there is, however, less support for the proposition that overall economic prosperity depends on these differences.

Finally, the perceived level of conflict between social groups is also similar across nations. There are clear nation-specific variations, but they do not follow the general pattern evident in respect of welfare policies. The results suggest that the seven nations, while sharing many beliefs about the nature of society and of human behaviour and motives, differ nonetheless in the value their citizens attach to equality of opportunity and outcome, and in their beliefs about how governments might best achieve these goals.

Notes

1. The detailed figures for the seven nations discussed in this chapter are:

Netherlands	27.6%	Hungary	16.2%
Italy	28.0%	Australia	17.0%
West Germany	24.0%	USA	17.0%
Britain	19.0%		

Source: OECD, 1988

2. For example, in the USA health and medical care for the poor is covered by Medicaid, for the elderly by Medicare and for most employed people by private health care. For some employed people no collective protection exists.
3. As Cameron (1978) and Hicks and Swank (1984) have demonstrated, the comprehensiveness of a country's welfare provision varies inversely with the electoral strength of its right-wing political party (or parties).
4. At 37 per cent the Dutch are much more heavily represented in the bottom three levels of the social standing scale than are the other six nations. This is probably because they used a ladder with a widening base, clearly suggesting that more people were on the bottom rungs than in the rest of the scale. In the other countries the vertical scale was uniform throughout its length.
5. We have not included Hungary in this discussion. Hungarian data were not available for the social welfare policy and class conflict scales because one of the constituent questions was not asked. Moreover, occupational details were not collected in the same format as in the other countries.
6. The numbers in **Table 4.5** are a measure of association called gamma. It can range from a low of .000, indicating no relationship between two variables to a high of +1.00, indicating a perfect relationship. Here a positive relationship means that those with lower income, lower status occupations and less schooling are more in favour of the welfare state and levelling policies, and see more inequality and class conflict than do those with higher incomes, higher occupational status, and greater education. As a rule of thumb, social scientists might consider gammas below 0.2 as weak, even if they are significant. Gammas in the range 0.2–0.3 can be considered moderate, and over 0.3 they begin to become strong.

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4.1 SUPPORT FOR WELFARE PROGRAMMES (1987: B207b,d,e)
by country

	Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Hungary
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT TO REDUCE THE DIFFERENCE IN INCOME BETWEEN PEOPLE WITH HIGH INCOMES AND THOSE WITH LOW INCOMES.							
Strongly agree	21	7	9	17	16	35	31
Agree	42	21	33	39	48	46	46
Neither agree nor disagree	12	24	20	15	11	9	11
Disagree	19	36	28	14	18	7	7
Strongly disagree	3	12	6	8	6	2	2
Can't choose	3	3	4	8	2	1	3
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROVIDE A JOB FOR EVERYONE WHO WANTS ONE.							
Strongly agree	23	14	10	35	23	44	45
Agree	35	30	28	39	51	38	45
Neither agree nor disagree	17	20	24	13	16	9	5
Disagree	20	25	27	6	8	7	3
Strongly disagree	3	9	6	3	1	1	1
Can't choose	3	1	5	5	1	1	2
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD SPEND LESS ON BENEFITS FOR THE POOR.							
Strongly agree	1	3	2	1	4	2	3
Agree	4	14	12	4	17	5	7
Neither agree nor disagree	12	22	22	11	22	6	15
Disagree	53	43	47	32	39	34	47
Strongly disagree	29	15	12	48	16	49	25
Can't choose	1	2	5	3	3	4	3
BASE: Unweighted	*1212*	*1564*	*1574*	*1397*	*1638*	*1037*	*2606*

4.1 (continued) SUPPORT FOR WELFARE PROGRAMMES (1987: B207f,g)
by country

	Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Hungary
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROVIDE A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING FOR THE UNEMPLOYED							
Strongly agree	17	6	5	16	10	22	
Agree	47	30	30	47	49	46	
Neither agree nor disagree	18	26	30	21	23	16	n/a *
Disagree	13	30	25	8	13	11	
Strongly disagree	3	6	5	4	2	3	
Can't choose	2	3	5	6	2	2	
THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROVIDE EVERYONE WITH A GUARANTEED BASIC INCOME							
Strongly agree	20	6	7	16	10	24	39
Agree	40	15	30	35	38	41	39
Neither agree nor disagree	13	20	21	17	18	11	11
Disagree	22	40	30	15	23	13	7
Strongly disagree	4	17	8	9	8	8	2
Can't choose	2	3	5	9	4	2	2
BASE: Unweighted	*1212*	*1564*	*1574*	*1397*	*1368*	*1027*	*2606*

* This item was not asked in Hungary

4.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING GETTING AHEAD IN LIFE (1987: B207a-g)
by country

HOW IMPORTANT FOR GETTING AHEAD IN LIFE IS ... ?	Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Hungary
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
... COMING FROM A WEALTHY FAMILY							
Essential	4	4	4	7	1	6	10
Very important	17	16	14	17	10	14	18
Not important at all	74	68	76	73	77	76	53
... HAVING WELL-EDUCATED PARENTS							
Essential	3	8	4	8	1	7	10
Very important	24	31	16	30	25	36	16
Not important at all	7	3	12	6	7	6	12
... HAVING A GOOD EDUCATION YOURSELF							
Essential	24	35	22	38	14	25	13
Very important	49	49	46	48	60	50	25
Not important at all	1	*	1	*	1	1	2
... AMBITION							
Essential	38	47	40	39	29	17	28
Very important	41	45	44	47	47	31	44
Not important at all	1	*	*	1	1	2	1
... NATURAL ABILITY							
Essential	14	13	19	16	7	24	28
Very important	63	46	48	61	44	49	42
Not important at all	1	*	*	1	1	1	1
... HARD WORK							
Essential	36	37	33	29	18	19	25
Very important	48	52	49	38	49	39	36
Not important at all	1	*	*	2	1	4	2
... KNOWING THE RIGHT PEOPLE							
Essential	13	8	11	10	7	18	15
Very important	37	31	31	42	36	48	26
Not important at all	3	3	6	3	2	1	5
BASE: Unweighted	*1318*	*1584*	*1574*	*1397*	*1858*	*1887*	*1606*

Note: the answer categories 'fairly important', 'not very important' and 'can't choose' have been omitted from this table

4.2 (continued) FACTORS INFLUENCING GETTING AHEAD IN LIFE (1987: B207h-m)
by country

4.2 (continued) FACTORS INFLUENCING GETTING AHEAD IN LIFE (1987: B207h-m)
by country

HOW IMPORTANT FOR GETTING AHEAD IN LIFE IS ... ?	Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Hungary
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
... HAVING POLITICAL CONNECTIONS							
Essential	2	3	5	6	1	22	12
Very important	5	13	9	16	5	33	17
Not important at all	28	14	23	18	31	10	11
... A PERSON'S RACE *							
Essential	3	2	4	7	1	2	-
Very important	14	12	10	15	6	8	n/a
Not important at all	18	23	37	30	35	52	
... A PERSON'S RELIGION							
Essential	2	4	2	4	1	3	2
Very important	3	10	3	7	3	11	3
Not important at all	45	35	47	47	50	44	58
... THE PART OF THE COUNTRY A PERSON COMES FROM							
Essential	1	1	1	2	*	2	1
Very important	6	6	4	5	2	10	3
Not important at all	30	36	47	48	48	41	58
... BEING BORN A MAN OR A WOMAN							
Essential	2	3	2	6	*	2	4
Very important	10	12	7	15	3	12	8
Not important at all	30	27	45	31	45	38	32
... A PERSON'S POLITICAL BELIEFS							
Essential	1	1	1	4	*	3	8
Very important	4	7	3	14	2	18	16
Not important at all	16	25	48	26	41	33	17
BASE: Unweighted	*1318*	*1584*	*1574*	*1397*	*1858*	*1887*	*1606*

Note: the answer categories 'fairly important', 'not very important' and can't choose' have been omitted from this table

* This item was not asked in Hungary

4.3 NECESSITY OF INEQUALITY FOR GENERAL PROSPERITY (1987: B204e,f)
by country

	Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Hungary
LARGE DIFFERENCES IN INCOME ARE NECESSARY FOR [COUNTRY'S] PROSPERITY	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Strongly agree	4	5	4	4	2	3	6
Agree	22	26	23	20	14	15	19
Neither agree nor disagree	24	28	31	23	20	16	17
Disagree	38	31	32	29	43	37	38
Strongly disagree	9	5	6	16	16	23	13
Can't choose	3	4	4	10	5	6	8
ALLOWING BUSINESS TO MAKE GOOD PROFITS IS THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE EVERYONE'S STANDARD OF LIVING							
Strongly agree	10	10	10	7	4	13	16
Agree	43	37	44	33	27	45	38
Neither agree nor disagree	19	23	24	21	23	19	20
Disagree	21	23	17	20	28	14	15
Strongly disagree	3	4	3	8	8	7	4
Can't choose	3	3	3	11	10	4	8
BASE: Unweighted	*1212*	*1564*	*1574*	*1397*	*1638*	*1027*	*2606*

4.4 ASSESSMENT OF CONFLICT BETWEEN SOCIAL GROUPS (1987: B210a-c)
by country

	Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Hungary
IN YOUR OPINION, IN [COUNTRY] HOW MUCH CONFLICT IS THERE BETWEEN ... ?	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
POOR PEOPLE AND RICH PEOPLE							
Very strong conflicts	13	15	8	8	29	24	18
Strong conflicts	38	44	35	28	49	35	36
Not very strong conflicts	40	33	47	44	20	30	33
There are no conflicts	5	3	6	11	1	9	10
Can't choose	4	5	5	8	2	2	4
THE WORKING CLASS AND THE MIDDLE CLASS							
Very strong conflicts	4	3	1	1	1	12	6
Strong conflicts	16	18	17	12	21	33	31
Not very strong conflicts	64	63	63	52	71	37	44
There are no conflicts	13	12	15	27	4	12	14
Can't choose	3	5	4	8	3	5	4
THE UNEMPLOYED AND PEOPLE WITH JOBS *							
Very strong conflicts	9	9	9	6	8	23	
Strong conflicts	30	37	37	31	41	35	
Not very strong conflicts	45	42	42	41	45	25	n/a
There are no conflicts	13	8	8	15	4	15	
Can't choose	4	4	5	8	3	3	
BASE: Unweighted	*1212*	*1564*	*1574*	*1397*	*1638*	*1027*	*2606*

* This item was not asked in Hungary

4.4 (continued) ASSESSMENT OF CONFLICT BETWEEN SOCIAL GROUPS (1987: B210d,e) by country

	Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Hungary
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
MANAGEMENT AND WORKERS							
Very strong conflicts	10	9	7	10	17	17	9
Strong conflicts	45	44	43	41	51	35	32
Not very strong conflicts	38	39	42	33	27	38	44
There are no conflicts	4	3	3	8	1	8	10
Can't choose	4	5	5	7	5	3	5
FARMERS AND CITY PEOPLE							
Very strong conflicts	4	8	8	1	5	7	5
Strong conflicts	22	28	35	9	27	17	20
Not very strong conflicts	46	47	43	40	56	34	44
There are no conflicts	22	12	10	41	8	39	27
Can't choose	6	5	4	9	5	3	4
BASE: Unweighted	*1212*	*1564*	*1574*	*1397*	*1638*	*1027*	*1606*

4.5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND ATTITUDES TO INEQUALITY – GAMMAS* (1987: see notes below) by country

	Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Hungary
	γ	γ	γ	γ	γ	γ	γ
INCOME DIFFERENCES TOO LARGE (B207a)							
Family income	.207	.118	.198	.200	.417	.236	(.035)
Occupation	.240	.078	.155	.152	.240	.137	+
Education	.152	.152	.196	.189	.256	.229	(-.017)
INEQUALITY RESULTS FROM CLASS INTERESTS (Scale)							
Family income	.234	.224	.186	.165	.265	.120	.180
Occupation	.256	.174	.152	.143	.161	(.078)	+
Education	.282	.235	.233	.142	.252	(.016)	.346
DEGREE OF CLASS CONFLICT (scale)							
Family income	(.032)	.094	.121	(.116)	.247	.242	+
Occupation	.054	.122	.107	.081	.097	(.053)	+
Education	(-.042)	.183	(.086)	(-.026)	(.107)	.150	+
BASE: Unweighted	*1212*	*1564*	*1574*	*1397*	*1638*	*1027*	*1606*

* Gamma (γ) is a measure of association which can range from nil (indicating no relationship) to ±1.00 (indicating a perfect relationship). For further details, see note 7 at the end of Chapter 4. Bracketed figures are not statistically significant at the .05 per cent level.

\+ Not calculated (missing data)

Notes. SOCIAL WELFARE POLICIES: scale derived from four items (B207d; B207f; B207g).
FAMILY INCOME: Gross household income, divided into thirds.
OCCUPATION: respondent's occupation divided into eight categories: administration; professional and technical; clerical; skilled manual; sales; service; semi-skilled manual; unskilled manual.
EDUCATION: years of schooling dichotomized.
INEQUALITY RESULTS FROM CLASS INTERESTS: scale derived from two items (B204c, g).
DEGREE OF CLASS CONFLICT: scale derived from four items (B210a, b, c, d).

4.5 (continued) SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND ATTITUDES TO INEQUALITY - GAMMAS* (1987; see notes below) by country

		Britain	USA	Australia	West Germany	Netherlands	Italy	Hungary
		γ	γ	γ	γ	γ	γ	γ
SOCIAL WELFARE POLICIES (Scale)								
	Family income	.266	.312	.255	.191	.274	.283	+
	Occupation	.276	.199	(.123)	.122	.118	.076	+
	Education	.248	.272	.146	(.110)	(.060)	.267	+
REDUCE INCOME DIFFERENCES (B107b)								
	Family income	.244	.282	.214	.264	.425	.261	.091
	Occupation	.252	.171	.179	.198	.237	(.076)	+
	Education	.270	.265	.173	.174	.279	.202	.198
HELP FOR CHILDREN FROM POOR FAMILIES TO GO TO UNIVERSITY (B107c)								
	Family income	.230	.270	.230	(.124)	.321	.195	.117
	Occupation	.211	.137	(.137)	.111	.169	(.105)	+
	Education	.161	.131	.166	(.032)	.200	(.045)	.283
PROGRESSIVE TAXATION (B109)								
	Family income	.148	(.110)	(.045)	.187	(.117)	.184	.093
	Occupation	.196	(.032)	(.009)	.133	-- (.001)	(.012)	+
	Education	.149	(.113)	(.033)	.103	(-.035)	(.087)	(.026)
BASE:								
	Unweighted	1212	1564	1574	1392	1648	1027	2606

* Gamma (γ) is a measure of association which can range from nil (indicating no relationship) to +1.00 (indicating a perfect relationship). For further details, see note 7 at the end of Chapter 4. Bracketed figures are not statistically significant at the .05 per cent level.

+ Not calculated (missing data)

5 Kinship and friendship

*Janet Finch**

Relationships with family and friends may be the most rewarding features of human experience, but they are also sometimes among the most difficult. If we had to predict what people living in Italy, Hungary or Australia might have most in common, safe bets probably would be wanting to do the best for their children; striving to keep their immediate family happy and comfortable; forming and keeping close relationships with relatives and friends. In other words, people living in all sorts of different circumstances and cultures can identify with family life and strife. The worldwide popularity of television soaps, whether set in wealthy Texas or suburban Melbourne, attests to that. In this sense, family life 'travels well'.

So it is not surprising that, on first sight, the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) data on social networks from seven different countries (Australia, Austria, Britain, Hungary, Italy, USA, West Germany) reveal many more similarities than differences. But under scrutiny variations do begin to emerge. In this chapter, we concentrate on comparisons *between* countries, although where it seems important we shall comment on *within*-country differences. We have chosen three main themes, mainly because these have long been identified in the literature as key dimensions of kin and friend relationships:

- contact and support (the two features of close relationships)
- gender divisions in family relationships
- families and friends (the twin foundations of personal networks)

In concentrating on these areas, we have in mind the question: do these

*Professor of Social Relations, Lancaster University