"Oh! Iben's Here Now, So We Better Behave Properly"— The Production of Class as Morality in Research Encounters

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Abstract: This article is a study of how class is produced in research encounters as matters of morality. I engage various class perspectives, arguing that class today occurs in subtle ways, being lived as judgments and struggles around moral authorization. I draw on my experiences during six months of ethnographic fieldwork among ethnic Danish middle- and working-class parents when involved in their six-year-old children's start in the final preschool class. In light of my methodological problems with establishing trustful relations with the participants, I argue that I was being interpreted as a judge with a mandate to pass moral judgments on the parents. While this interpretation was common among the participants, they positioned themselves in three radically different ways towards the researcher and "judge": "eager to get a positive judgment," "in the same boat" and "refusing to get judged." This, I argue, reflects contours of class relations in contemporary, neoliberal societies. I also call for acknowledgment of how the power relations embedded in social, qualitative research are often matters of class. Further, I argue that in a broader methodological perspective, we also need to recognize and investigate the classed dimensions of social research to enhance our understanding of the processes involved in qualitative studies.

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1. Introduction: The Researcher as a Catalyst of Classed Positioning

In this article, I report on my methodological experiences during half a year of ethnographic fieldwork among ethnic Danish middle- and working-class parents at three Danish primary schools as the parents were involved in their child's start in the final pre-school class. In a previous *FQS* publication, LISIAK points out that:

> "Our performances in the field are gendered, classed, and ethnicized. Regardless of how much we may want to appear 'neutral' or 'objective' as researchers, regardless of how much we may strive to blend into the field, we end up being watched and judged by our respondents ... " (2015, §31). [1]

Here I will further explore this point of view from LISIAK's article, mainly focusing on class. I draw on a revitalized interest in the cultural and subjective dimensions of class (DEVINE, SAVAGE, SCOTT & CROMPTON, 2004; LAWLER, 2005a; REAY, 1998a) in which the concept of class is being reformulated and broadened. This is necessary because one of the consequences of the transition from industrial to financial capitalism—or neoliberalism (TYLER, 2015)—is that the link between class and identity appears to be weak (CASEY, 2010). As class thereby seems to be "leaking beyond the traditional measures of classification" (SKEGGS, 2005, p.969), there is a need to develop qualitative approaches that are sensitive towards the fuzzy and subtle character of class and its cultural and subjective dimensions. The aim of this article is to suggest such a rethinking of the concept of class. [2]

In the revitalizing and broadening of the concept of class, it is argued that class today occurs in quite fluid and subtle ways with moral evaluations as a central dimension (BOTTERO, 2009; SAYER, 2005; SKEGGS, 1997, 2004a, 2005, 2011). In my contribution to develop an approach to class that is sensitive towards this moral dimension, I draw on a small feminist body of sociological/psycho-sociological work on class. These are referred to by HEY (2003, p.321) as "the 'English' school of feminist post-structuralists"; examples are LAWLER (2000), MAHONY and ZMROCZEK (1997), SKEGGS (1997) and WALKERDINE (1997). [3]

I argue that class was being produced in terms of morality in my research encounters through the ways in which the participants positioned themselves towards me, a white, middle-class researcher, and through their interpretation of my presence, or in LISIAK's words, through the ways I was "watched and judged" by my respondents. [4]

I will begin with a description of the methodological problems I experienced during the fieldwork I conducted from August 2013 to January 2014 (Section 2). After that, I will introduce my theoretical lens for viewing class and its moral dimensions (Section 3). This will be followed by an account of the methodology of the study and the data production (Section 4-6). My analysis will then reveal three ways of approaching my identity as a researcher (Section 7-9), leading on to a discussion (Section 10) and conclusion (Section 11). [5]

2. How Methods Produce Class

The notion that methods produce class is briefly mentioned by SKEGGS, WOOD and THUMIN (2008). They explain how their own social positions worked to produce class in their research encounters, as the participants, due to their different classes, interpreted the three researchers differently, as "an equal who happened to be an academic, a junior researcher, a student, a representative of the state or social worker, someone they could help or who could help them, or someone whose identity was simply baffling" (p.7). [6]

This is the insight that I want to investigate further by analyzing my experiences of classed positioning during the fieldwork among the parents. I was dealing with tricky problems regarding how to blend in—every time I entered a site, it had a significant impact. I also had difficulty in establishing equal or trustful relations with most of the participants. While some totally ignored me, others kept me busy in their striving to get my full attention. I simply felt like a magnet, with some participants repelling me, whilst others seemed to be drawn towards me. [7]

My point of departure is however a reversal of the point of view of SKEGGS et al.: I argue that I was being interpreted *in the same* way by the participants, who then *positioned themselves differently* towards this interpretation of my presence. The breakthrough in my analytical reflections when moving between the fieldwork and theory appeared one evening, when I was watching a lecture by SKEGGS, held at Stockholm University in 2011 and posted on YouTube (SKEGGS, 2011). Here she argued that class can be understood as a dialogical relationship between those who judge and those who are being judged; between those who can authorize their judgments and those who cannot. In this sense, judgment is fundamental to class relationship. [8]

At that very moment, a number of pieces fell into place, because I realized that this "judging perspective" might enable me to theorize what was going on between the lines, right under the surface, when I met with the participants during the fieldwork: *I was being interpreted as a "judge," authorized and with an institutionalized power to make judgments on the participants*. [9]

I was quite uncomfortable with this insight. I was embarrassed with the power given to me: I did not feel entitled to the authorization, and my aim was certainly not to pass moral judgments on the parents. Rather, I had expected to conduct a critical inquiry of the role of the imperative of parent involvement in an alliance with the parents, and now I found myself at the center of these odd judgmental processes. [10]

One example is that when I arrived at the social arrangements, organized by the parents, I was often met with cheerful and friendly statements like: "Oh! Iben's here now, so we better behave properly." Although these statements served as a way of taking the sting out of it in a witty way, this revealed that they considered me as a monitoring judge. However, as my analysis will show, not all the participants wanted to "behave properly" in order to "get a positive judgment."

Some actually positioned themselves *as* judges while others simply resisted contact. [11]

3. Class as Moral Judgments: Theorizing the Researcher as a "Judge"

Neoliberalism marginalizes class as an explanation of inequality (McLAREN, 2005) while at the same time it reinforces class differences in terms of evaluations of moral worth (LAMONT, 2012). This is what makes an investigation of the moral dimensions of class highly relevant. [12]

In this article, I conceptualize class, not merely as an economic and/or educational determinant, but rather as a relational, dynamic and negotiated process which is "both a social filter and a key mechanism individuals utilise in placing themselves and others" (REAY, 1997, p.226). Seen in this light, the interpretation of me as a judge reflects class as a social filter and as a key mechanism for placing the researcher as well as the participants themselves. [13]

Several qualitative researchers on class argue further that it is lived and experienced as judgments (REAY, 2005; SKEGGS, 1997, 2005; STEEDMAN, 1986; WALKERDINE & LUCEY, 1989) and that moral evaluations of self and others in general often relate and respond to class (SAYER, 2005, p.7). However, a central feature of class is that it is rarely mentioned explicitly, as it is an embarrassing topic (SAYER, 2005). Instead class usually appears as moral euphemisms (BOTTERO, 2009) which are "relying on the process of interpretation to do the work of association" (SKEGGS, 2005, p.965). In the present article, I intend to shed light on how these euphemistic processes of "evaluation, moral attribution and authorization in the production of subjectivity" (p.976) were infusing the research encounters during the fieldwork. [14]

It has also been stated that the core of contemporary class relations is struggles around moral authorization (LAMONT, 2000; LAWLER, 2005a; SAYER, 2005; SKEGGS, 2004b). Therefore, an understanding of class configurations requires attention to these negotiations. What I suggest is that the interpretation of me as a moral judge and the different ways that the participants positioned themselves towards this judge actually reflect some contours of class relations. [15]

4. Classed Positioning and Questions of Power

The understanding of the relations between the researcher and the participants as a meeting between positions (HARRÉ & LANGENHOVE, 1999) implies that the participants as well as the researcher draw on the categories already available in the field (JENSEN, 2009, 2012; RINGER, 2013). Further, as noted by SAVVAKIS and TZANAKIS (2004), the processes of positioning therefore indicate the formal and informal hierarchies that already exist in the field. [16]

Therefore the point of departure in this article is that the researcher actually—since being labeled "researcher" requires an academic degree—enters the field

with a rather explicit class status, in Denmark considered as a privileged middle-class status (FABER, PRIEUR, ROSENLUND & SKJØTT-LARSEN, 2012; OLSEN, PLOUG, ANDERSEN, SABIERS & ANDERSEN, 2014), only held by a few. This often results in asymmetric power relations: besides being equipped with a symbolic power to define the problem under study (BOURDIEU et al., 1999 [1993]), the researcher is also embodied with a considerable amount of institutionalized cultural capital (BOURDIEU, 2010 [1979]); BOURDIEU & PASSERON, 2006 [1970]). [17]

In their attempts to reduce the symbolic violence latent when conducting interviews, BOURDIEU et al. have suggested that establishing "social proximity and familiarity" in the relations between researcher and participants is significant, such as using deputies recruited from the field (1999 [1993], p.610). However, this is not without problems as the researcher is not able to plan, choose or control the positions she, or the deputies, will occupy during the production of data (HARRINGTON, 2003; LISIAK, 2015). Therefore asymmetric power relations might be unavoidable in some research encounters. Moreover, one might question whether striving for familiarity is a way of actually minimizing the asymmetric power relations embedded in research encounters: is there not a risk that they might just be blurred? [18]

Further, as noted by PORTELLI, equality in the research encounters might be an ideal for the researcher "as a condition for a less distorted communication and a less biased collection of data" (1991, p.31). However:

> Equality… cannot be wished into being. It does not depend on the researcher's goodwill but on social conditions. The very need for anthropological research in Western societies implies the recognition and observation of otherness in subjects who are not on the same social and political plane with the observer. As long as informants who belong to oppressed or marginal social groups hesitate to open up to members of the elite, every field worker will be involved in a complicated game of hide and seek" (ibid.). [19]

Furthermore, during the fieldwork I experienced that the power relations were much more diffuse and unclear than the traditional approach seems to be able to capture. Sometimes they were totally invisible, sometimes it felt disturbing and uncomfortable and at other times, I was rather powerless. So in contrast to BOURDIEU et al.'s attempts to "neutralize a major cause of distortion in the investigative relationship" (1999 [1993], p.611), I thought of these distortions as part of the data being produced. [20]

5. From Method to Context: Class and/in the Research Encounters

I therefore began to put the interactions between the participants and myself at the center of my analysis (JÄRVINEN & MIK-MEYER, 2005), thereby rejecting any ideals about the researcher not influencing the field under study (LISIAK, 2015). So instead of trying to minimize my influence whenever I entered a site, I engaged with an approach that emphasized observation as a context for interaction among those involved in the research (ANGROSINO, 2007). The point here is that instead of expecting to "find class out there," I became able to explore how class was being produced in the research encounters as different ways of positioning oneself towards me, the researcher and "judge." [21]

This is in line with an increasing tendency among qualitative social researchers (THUESEN, TANGGAARD & VITUS, 2014): instead of viewing disharmony and conflicts as merely technical problems caused by using "wrong" methods or by the researcher's inadequate navigation in the field, this approach acknowledges the fact that research is embedded in and also (re-)produces power relations. Within this perspective, conflicts, resistance and lack of proximity or trust are not something to overcome, but rather considered unavoidable and as part of the data produced. These perspectives therefore enabled me to explore the power relations (re)-produced in the research encounters as matters of class. [22]

This "non-restrictive" approach further allows all parts of conversations or interactions among the participants—also those initiated by the researcher—to be analyzed as parts of the data produced. Therefore, what traditionally has been written off as irrelevant chat or pauses in the situations under observation are, in this perspective, part of the data produced (THUESEN et al., 2014). [23]

This seems to be in line with a previous *FQS* article in which VANGKILDE and SAUSDAL (2016) suggest a "mutual participatory observation" approach in which the researcher initiates dialogue and debate around the topic under study. In order to avoid "overthinking" when studying "ourselves," the solution is to "move towards a more generative, active and outward sense of reflexivity, which focuses on the potential in openly exposing and debating our reflections, concepts, and theories with our partners in the field ..." (§27). VANGKILDE and SAUSDAL further quote GULLESTAD, who points out that we should not only look at ourselves in the same way as we look at the participants, but also see ourselves through their eyes (1989, p.71). [24]

These perspectives seem promising, and I certainly do acknowledge the importance of looking at ourselves through the participants' eyes. However, I have to question whether it would have been fruitful to invite the participants to a dialogue on class and the moral significance of it that I experienced. To pose questions like: "Hey guys, I really feel that you're treating me as a kind of moral judge! What do you think about that in a class perspective?" simply seemed impossible. [25]

There are several reasons for this: class is something fundamentally illegitimate as it inevitably raises questions about moral worth. Although it is a central concern in the social sciences, class is highly tabooed in everyday life, not least in one of the hitherto strongholds of the welfare state, Denmark (FABER et al., 2012). [26]

SAYER argues that although we might prefer class not to be seen as a matter of worth, this only makes the existence of class inequalities more worrying (2005, p.1). Seen in this light, "class is not an innocent descriptive term but is a loaded moral signifier" (SAVAGE, BAGNALL & LONGHURST, 2001, p.889). Therefore, there is a range of particular challenges when class becomes worded explicitly. In a qualitative interview, for example, informants often respond elusively (FABER, 2008; PAYNE & GREW, 2005; SAVAGE et al., 2001; SKEGGS et al., 2008), because class differences "conflict with moral principles and dispositions supporting equal recognition and respect" (SAYER, 2005, p.4). [27]

Furthermore, as noted by SKEGGS, to speak about class is something different from living it; people rarely consider themselves or their practices in terms of class. In contrast to social categories like gender and ethnicity, which are often referred to explicitly, class rather works as a "structuring absence" (1997, p.74). Moreover, this raises ethical considerations regarding the well-being of the participants. As noted by SAYER,

> "on the one hand, to attempt to ignore the fact that someone has little economic or cultural capital can be highly insensitive; on the other, to acknowledge their lack of such capital can seem patronising, as reinforcing ('rubbing it in') rather than countering inequality" (2005, p.172). [28]

Seen in this light, asking the participants explicitly about class and morals would probably have resulted in strong objections, resentment and perhaps even worries and pain. It is therefore questionable whether I would have gained insights into the processes of moral evaluation that I was becoming interested in. For this reason, instead of following the suggestions from VANGKILDE and SAUSDAL, I chose to make a clear cut from the field and keep class as my theoretical lens. Acknowledging the risk of "narcissism sometimes verging on exhibitionism" (BOURDIEU, 2003 [2000], p.282) but also aware of the significant problems when dealing with class, I stuck to reflexive ethnography (DAVIES, 1999) in order to try to look at myself, the researcher, through the participants' eyes. [29]

6. The Study: Parental Involvement

Parenthood has increasingly become a matter of public concern (GILLIES, 2008; LEE, BRISTOW, FAIRCLOTH & MACVARISH , 2014; ULE, ŽIVODER & DU BOIS-REYMOND, 2015) and recent years have seen an intensification of relations between the Danish primary school and families emphasizing parental involvement as the way to successful schooling (DANNESBOE, 2012; KNUDSEN, 2010). [30]

When a child starts at school, parents are expected to establish a kind of community around the child's particular class. This is initiated through establishing local parent councils, a range of social events at the school, playgroups in the homes, and also through expectations that the group of parents will meet in other contexts, both with and without the children, in order to become friends. [31]

This is part of a neoliberal responsibilization which individualizes class differences, as they are transformed into questions of subjectivity, moral worth and "right choices." Accompanied by "the preventative turn" (McCARTHY, 2011) especially targeting parents due to "parent determinism" (FUREDI, 2001), this further leads to a situation in which displaying one's worth as a parent becomes central (FINCH, 2007). [32]

In my PhD project, I explore these processes in relation to health, gender and class. Although the gender-neutral term 'parenting' is used, research indicates that in practice it is often the mothers who are involved in the everyday care of the children (BACH, 2011; GILLIES, 2007; LAWLER, 2000; REAY, 1999; ULE et al., 2015). My study also showed that it was predominantly mothers who took care of the practical aspects of parental involvement. [33]

The parents I recruited had children starting at schools with average profiles (one independent school (a so-called *friskole*), one state school in Copenhagen proper and one state school outside the capital). I was present at the three schools when the parents attended their first parents' meeting. Here I introduced my project in broad terms and established contact with the parents, making particular contact with those who volunteered to join the different organizing groups as a start. I also got my e-mail address on their lists, to be able to receive invitations to the social events and maintain contact with the parents. [34]

During the fieldwork, I participated in a range of the social events that constitute parent involvement. As far as possible, I extracted empirical data from the same kind of events in the three groups of parents. During the autumn and winter of 2013-2014, I participated in four parents' meetings initiated by the schools and seven meetings held by the local parent councils in their homes, and also thirteen different social arrangements, e.g., parties at the schools and the affiliated institutions (after-school centers, playgrounds, etc.), playgroups and children's birthdays. I participated in six social arrangements accompanying a family the whole day while they were preparing for the event. I also observed 15 home-

school meetings and 21 enrollment meetings with the school nurses. In addition, I conducted ten individual walk and talk conversations with mothers, when they picked up their children in the afternoon, lasting from 30 minutes to 1½ hours, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with 6 mothers, lasting from 50 minutes to 2½ hours. I also gathered written material, e.g., invitations and e-mails. [35]

Besides the field notes, whenever something puzzled or affected me, I wrote it down in a field diary. I also wrote a logbook describing the fieldwork in a meta-perspective, e.g., how my appointments with the participants came about and who the stakeholders were. [36]

In the following sections, I will show how I was being interpreted as a privileged middle-class judge and I will analyze three ways of positioning oneself towards this judge and discuss their classed implications. [37]

7. Eager to Get a Positive Judgment: "Well, Eating Just One Date, That'll Be Ok, Won't It?"

Parents with this "eager to get a positive judgment"-approach were very welcoming and kind; however, I also felt that they were extremely attentive towards me and often I had the feeling that they were very keen to show me what good parents they were. [38]

The following example stems from a conversation with Veronica, a part-time teacher (lower middle-class) and mother of a child at the *friskole*. The conversation takes place in a café near the school and lasts 2½ hours. In this sequence, the mother explains to me how her son is making his own lunch box.

> "Mother: And then the fruit, it varies: Always a banana, and then—it could be a kiwi or mandarin or an apple or something like that, you see.
>
> Iben: Mm … so what about those fig rolls and that type of ...
>
> Mother: No!
>
> Iben: ... snacks?
>
> Mother: That's sweets!
>
> Iben: Yeeeah—is it?
>
> Mother: Well, he's got—he actually just got—I was really quite unsure whether I should let go and do it or not, but I let him get one single date as well.
>
> Iben: Mmh?
>
> Mother: Mmm, and so it's become part of his lunch, too—and you know, I'm kind of thinking: well, eating just one date, that'll be ok, won't it?—But actually it IS sweets … It—it's a little healthier sweets, but after all: It IS sweets." [39]

Veronica does not seem to notice that I am trying to challenge her categorization of fig rolls as sweets, as I surprisingly, doubtfully ask: "Yeeah—is it?" Or perhaps she is rather using it as a basis for positioning herself as a kind of extraordinarily restrictive mother. Following this, what strikes me is the way in which Veronica

interrupts her own sentence three times, when telling me about the date: she has to let me know—before the point with the date—that she was having a lot of concerns about whether she should "let go" and do it or not. Here I am being interpreted as a moral judge—as a kind of "sugar police officer"—with a power to make judgments on Veronicas' worth as a mother. Further, Veronica positions herself as someone who is about to become judged. [40]

It is well argued that public health and health promotion discourses contribute to the moral regulation of society:

> "For centuries, the poor, the working class and immigrants have routinely been constructed as the Other in public health discourses and practices…On the inside of the boundary lies social order, 'Us', while the outside is 'a twilight place of outcasts, danger and pollution'" (LUPTON, 1995, p.47). [41]

Seen in this light, Veronica might be highlighting her restrictive approach to the lunchbox in order to position herself as a middle-class mother—"on the inside of the boundary." According to GILLIES, "[w]orking class mothering practices are held up as the antithesis of good parenting" (2007, p.2). Elsewhere it is addressed how the moral regulation embedded in health discourses is a matter of class, meaning that health works as an euphemism for class and as a marker of respectability, of doing proper mothering in contrast to "bad" mothering, where "risky lifestyle choices" on food and physical exercise, moral deprivation and working-classness are closely linked (AAMANN, 2015; AAMANN & LIVENG, 2016). [42]

Several scholars argue precisely that "good" parenting is actually white middle-class practices being universalized (LAWLER, 2005b; REAY, 1998b; VINCENT & BALL, 2007). Seen in this perspective, Veronica is positioning herself in line with a celebrated middle-class "tough love" parenting practice (JENSEN, 2010) as a mother who takes good care of the health of her son, restricting his desire for sweet fruit and cultivating his self-discipline (LAREAU, 2011), also seen in her use of the phrase "letting go." So when Veronica seems eager to position herself in line with the celebrated and institutionalized parenting practices and thereby perhaps strives to "get a positive judgment," it might arise from her position in the squeezed middle causing anxiety (REAY, CROZIER & JAMES, 2011, p.102) and a "Fear of Falling" (EHRENREICH, 1989), of being deemed as morally inferior and thereby as a lower-class mother, not concerned with the health of her child and just "letting go." [43]

In this sense, class was produced in the conversation as a relation between the mother, positioning herself as someone who was about to become judged, and me, the judge. So Veronica does not try to challenge the authority of the judge. Rather she seems to accept that the researcher holds a mandate to evaluate and judge her moral worth as a mother. Further, this might be even stronger, as I myself am a mother of a schoolchild, because mothers tend to evaluate themselves as well as others and draw moral distinctions; these evaluations and moral distinctions are highly classed (FABER, 2008; PERRIER, 2012). [44]

8. In the Same Boat/Accumulating Further Value: "If Iben Hadn't Been There, We Probably Would Have Decided To Draw Lots Again!"

Other parents seemed much more relaxed when I was around. Among these parents, the power relations between the researcher and participants were often equal and thereby somewhat invisible, because the majority of these parents had spent at least five years on a university degree, just like me. Therefore, we were roughly the same age and had the same "lifestyle" (BOURDIEU, 2010 [1979], p.167). [45]

So instead of positioning themselves as people about to get a judgment, they were more eager to demonstrate how we were in the same boat. This is shown in the following encounter with Susan, a mother with a child in the school in central Copenhagen. From my field diary:

> "I am on my way to the first meeting of the local parent council, which is about to take place at the home of one of the families. At the front door, I meet one of the mothers. We walk together up the stairs. She tells me eagerly that her husband also holds a PhD scholarship, talks about his project and tells me that she also has a university degree and works in a large governmental organization—'under the same labor market agreement as you guys'." [46]

However, sometimes I also felt that my presence was used strategically in order to enhance the participants' own moral status. It is well argued that privileged middle-class parents are "skilled in using their social, economic and cultural capital to their advantage, especially within the educational system" (LANDEROS, 2011, p.248; see also BRANTLINGER, 2003; VINCENT & BALL, 2007). [47]

As the following example reveals, this also included using the presence of a researcher as a resource when positioning oneself; here, I am observing a home-school meeting at the *friskole* between the mother, Maria (privileged middle-class with a university degree of +5 years) and the two teachers:

> "Maria explains in detail the process of planning the playgroups and the meeting at a café, with another mother and me. Several times she addresses me or turns her head towards me; I respond by looking up and we smile at each other. She describes the small notes in pink and blue she made, with the children's names on, and the method of drawing lots, aimed to make the groups random but still with both boys and girls in each group. She says: 'And then oh dear, we got Birk's [her son] name first, so not only did I organize the playgroups, I also had to arrange the first round of play.' She turns towards me again and says with a laugh: 'If Iben hadn't been there, we probably would have decided to draw lots again!' " [48]

What I find notable is Maria's almost demonstrative responsiveness to my presence; through this easy-going attitude towards me, she expresses her position as someone who is totally comfortable and relaxed when dealing with the kind of people researchers are, as well as with research situations. In this way,

my presence works as a catalyst of her beneficial positioning towards the teachers. [49]

In front of the teachers, my presence also gets to work as a confirmation of her intensive involvement in the start of her son's schooling, as it allows her to display how much time and energy she has invested in organizing the playgroups. The witty addressing of my position as a judge—as someone you do not cheat in front of—works as a legitimization, enabling her to highlight her moral worth and quality parenting without running the risk of being labeled "assertive" or "a saint," cf., the witty claim that she would have "cheated" by doing a redraw without my presence at the planning meeting. Thereby Maria is actively using the presence of the researcher to her advantage when displaying her involvedness to the teachers, subtly preventing being deemed "pushy" via the positioning of me as a judge and herself as a "potential cheater." [50]

The British researcher PERRIER points to a similar balance in her study on class, morality and mothering. The middle-class mothers in her interviews were "negotiating the boundaries of good motherhood and distanced themselves from two different types of 'bad' mothers: whilst they sometimes othered working-class mothers they were also haunted by the specter of the 'pushy' strategic middle-class mother" (2012, p.658). This tendency might be even stronger in Denmark and the rest of Scandinavia—the hitherto strongholds of the Western welfare states—due to a strong ideology of equality, often seen as a hallmark of Scandinavian culture (FABER et al., 2012; GULLESTAD, 1984, 1989; LIEN, LIDÉN & VIKE, 2001) and a strong sense of middle-classness (HARRITS, 2014). [51]

However, the hitherto egalitarian normative landscape of the Danish primary school seems to be contested by the shift from welfare to a neoliberal competition state, which has also reached Denmark with full force (ILLERIS, 2014; KNUDSEN, 2007; PEDERSEN, 2011). Schools now aim to ensure that all the resources and potentials of the population are activated and optimized via education (CHRISTOFFERSEN, 2014; OLSSON, 2008). [52]

In line with this, the US scholar LANDEROS points to the competitive ways in which the upper-middle-class mothers she interviewed were working hard to: "enhance their own status and that of their child in order to minimize the inherent risks of a capitalist economy" (2011, p.260). The competition is of course about paving the way for the children, in order to "'make up' a middle-class child" (VINCENT & BALL, 2007, p.1061) in a competitive social context where the reproduction of privileges appears both uncertain and at the same time more important than ever (REAY et al., 2011). But as noted by LANDEROS, it is also a matter of heightening their own individual status as good mothers as well as their family's status (2011, p.255). With this reasoning, it seems that Maria's balancing act between her striving to enhance her moral status and preventing herself being deemed as "too much" might spring from the paradox between the old praising of egalitarianism and equality and the competitiveness among parents, which is relatively new in the Danish context. [53]

The conversation goes on: now Maria is telling the teachers about the first round of play at a local playground, where four children and their parents were invited:

> "Maria describes how Lilly's parents had previously written in an e-mail that they would join, but then they did not show up at first. Later, Maria explains, the whole family turned up at the playground—it seemed they had forgotten about the playgroup appointment, and just happened to be going to the same playground! She pronounces their visit to the playground 'quite inappropriate'. During this evaluation, she turns towards me several times, saying: 'Well, you also saw the e-mails, Iben' and: 'Well, you were there as well, Iben.' " [54]

In this extract, Maria is positioning herself as someone with an authorized mandate to judge, as she devalues Lilly's parents; regardless of Lilly's parents' actual class background, Maria's classifying practice implies judging them as people with less moral worth and thereby as some lower (or upper) class parents who lag behind the imperative of proper parenting. Furthermore, I am being positioned as kind of a co-judge, as she several times points out that I have witnessed the written communication and also was at the playground, automatically assuming that I agree with the moral devaluation of Lilly's parents. Thereby my presence works not only as a backing for her judgments but also as an authorization of her mandate to judge. [55]

What I argue therefore is that class is produced in this research encounter, as Maria, due to her privileged middle-class position, is able to accumulate further moral value from my presence and thereby enhance her status. Not only is she positioning herself advantageously by positioning me as a moral judge you don't "cheat" in front of, she is also positioning herself as a moral judge, using my presence as an authorization of her mandate. [56]

Like Veronica, Maria does not challenge the authority of the judge. On the contrary, she positions herself as a judge, as she judges the other parents in front of the two teachers. In contrast to this, Veronica did not pass any judgments during our conversation. Neither did she position herself in the same boat as I. Both of these approaches towards me, however, were very welcoming; I had access and most of these parents were eager to be in contact with me. [57]

9. Resistance Towards the Judge/Class Resentment: "Jeez, You Gotta Translate That Into Normal Danish!"

It was radically different with the parents who positioned themselves in the third, "resistance"-way. I had difficulty in establishing contact with these parents. At the first parents' meeting at the school outside the capital with the majority of working-class parents, I presented my project in the same way as at the two schools in Copenhagen. From my field diary:

> "During my presentation, there is a significant distancing from me. When I say that I am going to conduct 'ethnographic fieldwork,' one mother sarcastically laughs and says: 'Jeez, you gotta translate that into normal Danish!' and the whole group of

parents strongly hoots. And when I say: 'I really hope you will join my project', another
mother giggles mockingly." [58]

The joke about my incomprehensible and "urban intellectual" language works as
a symbolic boundary (LAMONT, 2000) drawn between our different educational
levels, where I am being positioned as pretentious, using unnecessarily difficult
words. This attitude of distancing themselves from me was very significant. Even
though I intuitively "dressed down" (see also LISIAK, 2015, §10) and never put
my official signature on the bottom of the e-mails I wrote, in order to downplay the
institutionalized cultural capital provided to me by my educational status, when
trying to invite myself to the social events, I was not able to establish trustful
relations to this group of parents. The majority of parents were rejecting me,
typically by avoiding eye contact, turning their backs on me, or simply by not
answering the e-mails I wrote. For some time, I was rather frustrated, wondering
what was going on, trying to understand what I was doing wrong in my attempts
to establish contact. However, that evening, when I was watching the lecture by
SKEGGS, in which she argues that class relations ought to be investigated as
struggles around moral authorization, I came to understand their rejections as a
kind of class resistance. [59]

As in the previously elaborated analysis, these parents also interpreted me as a
'judge', authorized and with power to make moral judgments on the parental skills
of the participants. But these parents positioned themselves radically differently:
they did not try to get a positive judgment, like Veronica, nor did they position
themselves in the same boat as I; and they certainly did not use my presence
strategically to their benefit, in the competitive way that Maria did. On the
contrary, I argue, they were de-authorizing "the judge"! By the jokes about my
language and the ridiculing of my position, they worked to block what they
considered to be my mandate to apply a moral value judgment to them. As
WILLIS points out, "having a laff" (1981 [1977], p.29) is a significant way to resist
the authority of others. In this sense, these parents simply refused to be judged,
by avoiding contact with me. [60]

In Britain and the US, it is well argued that the white working classes in general
are exposed to an institutionalized massive condemnation (LeBESCO, 2007;
SVEINSSON, 2009, WALKERDINE & LUCEY, 1989). This springs from a long
history of controlling "the ungoverned masses"; for example FINCH (1993), using
Australia as a case, shows how the working class in the nineteenth century were
integrated as a unified, knowable population in order to regulate them.
Furthermore, this happened through processes whereby "motherhood became a
publicly accountable notion" (p.107). In this sense, therefore, the creation itself of
the working class and the political-moral regulation of mothering go hand in hand.
Due to this long history of institutionalized moral regulation and contempt of the
white working-class mother figure (ROSENBECK, 1999; SKEGGS, 2011; YEO,
2005), the position of the "lower classes" seems infused with a sense of being
morally devalued by representatives of institutions of the state. Seen in this light,
class was produced as an intuitive sense of resentment among these working-
class parents towards me, the privileged middle-class researcher. [61]

Furthermore, the power relations were quite unclear. On the one hand, I was interpreted as someone with a mandate to pass moral judgments on them. On the other hand, they simply refused me access. In this way, they actually demonstrated that they were not powerless, but rather quite the opposite. [62]

10. Class in Denmark

Though social differences are discreetly admitted, Denmark is rarely considered a class society (MURNING, 2013), but is rather seen as one of the strongholds of the welfare state. A strong ideology of equality seems to persist in Denmark and "not blowing one's own trumpet" is regarded a central value (PRIEUR & FABER, 2013). Why, then, study class in Denmark, "one of the most equal" societies in the world (OECD, 2016)? Because Denmark—despite a thorough economic redistribution and access to free further education—does have a range of the traditional class inequalities, well known from e.g., Britain and the US: lower school satisfaction among pupils from so-called "non-academic homes" (PEDERSEN, 2009) and profound social inequalities in health both among schoolchildren (RASMUSSEN, PEDERSEN & DUE, 2014) and in terms of life expectancy (DIDERICHSEN, ANDERSEN & MANUEL, 2011). [63]

Furthermore, the income gap between the poorest and the richest is increasing, which is being reinforced through a neoliberal "re-redistribution," e.g., a wide range of cutbacks in welfare services coupled with a lowering of taxes on luxury cars[1] and inheritance tax[2]. Thus it seems that class differences are being reinforced while at the same time silenced *as* class inequalities. A recent study with the telling title: The Scandinavian Fantasy: The Sources of Intergenerational Mobility in Denmark and the US[3], also points out a quite modest upward social mobility in line with the US (see also: BONKE & MUNK, 2003; HANSEN, 2015). Therefore, despite the expansion of the educational system in Denmark since WWII, the general education boost has not helped to reduce unequal opportunities. Rather the result is a general rise in the educational level, which means that the already privileged retain their lead (BENJAMINSEN, 2006). In this sense, class inequalities have always been present in Denmark, but now it seems that their significance is growing. [64]

Thus the relations between the Danish primary school and parents might be viewed as an extraordinarily strong case in a study of how class *still* lurks behind economic (re-redistribution, ideologies of equality (GULLESTAD, 1984; LIEN et al., 2001) and strong senses of middle-classness (FABER et al., 2012; HARRITS, 2014), as something else and something more than educational stratification and material differences. [65]

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1 http://punditokraterne.dk/2015/11/23/mindre-progressiv-registreringsafgift-er-ikke-skaevt-selv-om-man-elsker-fordelingspolitik/ [Accessed: May 4, 2017].

2 http://politiken.dk/indland/art5909341/Minister-Der-er-et-moralsk-argument-bag-s%C3%A6nkningen-af-arveafgift [Accessed: May 4, 2017].

3 http://www.rockwoolfonden.dk/app/uploads/2016/06/STUDY-P-Scandinavian_Fantasy_samt-appendix-WEB.pdf [Accessed: May 5, 2017].

11. Conclusion: Class and Moral Judgments in the Research Encounters

As the analysis has revealed, class—despite strong notions of egalitarianism in Denmark—is "deeply embedded in everyday interactions, in institutional processes, in struggles over identity, validity, self-worth and integrity even when it is not acknowledged" (REAY, 2005, p.924). Taking a 'researcher as a moral judge' perspective as the point of departure has enabled me to address some of the power relations embedded in the research encounters as matters of class. My findings suggest three ways of positioning oneself towards the researcher and "judge":

- The first (lower middle-class) mother was positioning herself as someone who was about to become judged, striving to make it a positive experience. I have argued that this springs from a "fear of falling," of being deemed as a lower-class and thereby morally inferior mother. Although "working class" seems to be linguistically expunged in Denmark (FABER, 2008), my analysis indicates that a fear of moral contempt is a persistent concern for some of the mothers, when interacting with the researcher and judge.
- The next (privileged middle-class) mother was positioning herself advantageously by positioning me as a judge and she was also positioning herself as a judge, using me to validate her judgment. I have argued that this might be a consequence of a shift from welfare state (with equity as a central value) to competition state (with social status as a central value) in which the already privileged seem to gain more.
- The third way of approaching me was a refusal to be judged by deauthorizing what the participants considered to be my mandate to pass moral judgments on them. This positioning was most common among the working-class parents. I have suggested that this springs from a history of institutionalized moral contempt and regulation of the working classes, leading to an intuitive resentment towards the privileged middle-class researcher. [66]

Moreover, I have addressed the issues of class and moral judgments as a gendered matter, as mainly mothers participated in my study. But there is a need for further studies on how class informs fathering, both because of new father identities and because research suggests that the categories of "working class" and "masculinity" actually can be a source of positive identification for men (LAMONT, 2000) in contrast to working class and femininity, which rather leads to disidentification (SKEGGS, 1997). [67]

Over the last two decades, the concept of class has largely been marginalized in socio-cultural research. However, SKEGGS (1997) argues that class inequality exists beyond its theoretical representation and that abandoning class as a theoretical tool therefore does not mean that it has ceased to exist (p.6). Rather the tendency to ascribe class as a thing from the past testifies to a middle-class hegemony:

"Making class invisible represents a historical stage in which the identity of the middle classes is assured. There was a time when the concept of class was considered necessary by the middle classes to maintain and consolidate differences in power: its recent invisibility suggests that these differences are now institutionalized, legitimated and well established" (p.7). [68]

Instead of leaving class behind, I have called for an expansion of the concept in order to grasp how class infuses the production of subjectivity in terms of moral evaluations and struggles over moral authorization, while at the same time being marginalized as a critical perspective in socio-cultural research. Because, as FRASER (2013) suggests, the shift from redistribution to politics of recognition indicates an "alliance" between (feminist) academics' critiques and neoliberalism, in which: "A perspective aimed originally at transforming state power into a vehicle of citizen empowerment and social justice is now used to legitimate marketization and state retrenchment" (p.222). McLAREN (2005) also calls for attention towards class structures as a focus point of inequality. [69]

In the search for methodological approaches that are sensitive towards the fuzziness of contemporary, neoliberal class relations, I have suggested an approach that considers distortion, discomfort and disharmony as parts of the data produced. This has enabled me to analyze some of the power relations produced in the research encounters as matters of class. Across different types of sites, I have elaborated how class was produced in the research encounters. [70]

However, I have to emphasize that not all research encounters produce class in terms of moral judgments, just as moral judgments are not always (although very often) about class. There is, therefore, also a need to investigate whether these judgmental processes are particularly significant among parents of schoolchildren in view of the role of the school in the reproduction of class-based inequality. As mentioned, the researcher is embodied with a considerable amount of institutionalized cultural capital. In the field of home-school relations, this might have a special significance. As I entered the field through the schools, and met the parents at their first parent meeting, the interpretation of me as a judge might also reflect that I was being seen as a school representative. Therefore, further research is needed in order to determine whether and how class is produced in other kinds of research encounters in different fields by other participants and their particular ways of "watching and judging" researchers. [71]

In a broader methodological perspective, we also need to recognize and investigate the classed dimensions of social research in order to continually develop qualified understandings of the kind of processes involved in qualitative studies. Downplaying the unequal power relations embedded in research encounters will not do. Therefore I would like to suggest that recognizing class in research encounters is a way to avoid the risk of throwing oil on the neoliberal fire. [72]

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