

Counting the Working Class for Working-Class Studies: Comparing Three Occupation-Based Definitions

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Abstract

A wide variety of definitions of the working class are in use across disciplines and even within working-class studies (Cohen 2001; Zweig 2001; Metzgar 2003; Wilson 2016; Wilson and Roscigno 2018). Responding to Zweig's (2016) call to maintain continuity in thinking about the working class in working-class studies by recognizing that 'the working class continues to exist in capitalist societies, within capitalist class dynamics, in which the organization of production underlies material, cultural, and political experience' (14), I delineate several definitions of the working class and take a close look at three operationalizations of the working class by occupational aggregations, one each suggested by Metzgar (2003) and Cohen (2001) and one I define, inspired by Florida (2002). Using 2017 American Community Survey data, I compare the demographics and geography of the working class through each of these definitions. I illustrate that by many definitions, the working class is a broad and diverse group of workers who live and work in rural, urban, and suburban places, while inequalities both within the working class and between it and other social classes remain pressing issues for investigation. This paper provides a guide for understanding definitions of the working class that will be useful for working-class studies scholars from all disciplines, regardless of methodologies.

Keywords

Working class, occupations, industries, quantitative analysis, definitions, identification, new economy, labor market

Introduction

No single way of defining the working class captures the range of circumstances that are meant to be communicated in the various observations and experiences in which the category is referred to. A wide variety of definitions of the working class are in use across disciplines, even within working-class studies, and increased interest from broader society has renewed discussions of the best way to identify members of this class (Cohen 2001; Zweig 2001; Metzgar 2003; Wilson 2016; Wilson and Roscigno 2018). In the US, much of this interest has been occupied with an oversimplified view of the working class as rural white male laborers (Morgan and Lee 2017; Mathur and Kasmir 2018). By many definitions, though, the working class is increasingly acknowledged as a demographically and circumstantially diverse group, with a larger proportion of women, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups, and living across the rural-urban spectrum (Wilson 2016; Wilson and Roscigno 2018). Inequalities both within the working class and between it and other social classes are of substantial scholarly interest. This is reflected in the

broad scope and the international contributor and reader base of this journal and other recent scholarship on the working class (Nelson 2017; Marambio-Tapia 2018; Wagner 2018; Wilson and Roscigno 2018).

So who are the working class? How do we go about counting today's working class for working-class studies? In this paper, I delineate and explore the working class as defined or operationalized in several different ways. I also take a close look at three occupational aggregations, two suggested by Metzgar (2003) and Cohen (2001) and one suggested by me and inspired by Florida (2002), and using 2017 American Community Survey data, I compare the demographic characteristics and geography of each of these three definitions.¹ The descriptive findings show that in the US the working class is larger and more diverse than popular discussion indicates, and that members of the working class are geographically situated mostly within metropolitan regions.

This paper answers Zweig's (2016) call to maintain continuity in thinking about the working class in working-class studies by recognizing that 'whatever the new labor processes or changes in the economy, the working class continues to exist in capitalist societies, within capitalist class dynamics, in which the organization of production underlies material, cultural, and political experience' (14). Casual observers may associate the working class with the 'rust belt' of the US or as a sought-after voting bloc. In this paper, however, I show that any meaningful definition reveals a diverse group of working people whose opportunities are shaped by the capitalist system in which they live and work.

Defining the Working Class

Self-Identification

Social-class self-identification can seem like the most straightforward way of identifying who is working class, because it basically asks people, 'Are you working class?' Major national polling, including Gallup and the General Social Survey (GSS), use this as a polling question in their surveys, and scholars have used it to study a range of characteristics of the working class, including vote choice (Bird and Newport 2017). For example, the GSS asks, 'If you were asked to use one of four names for your social class, which would you say you belong in: the lower class, the working class, the middle class, or the upper class?' (NORC 2019). This seems like a straightforward way of doing it. Gross described it as viewing social class as 'referent groups' (398), while Centers (1949) explained that it understands a person's social class as 'part of [their] ego, a feeling on [their] part of belongingness to something; and identification with something larger than [them]self' (27).

This approach to identifying a person's social class corresponds with what Wright (2005) describes as taking class as subjective location, and has been the subject of research on class culture and class identity formation (Lamont 1992; Stuber 2005, 2006). It asks how people '*locate themselves and others* within a social structure of inequality' (718) [emphasis Wright's]. As Wright (2005)

¹ Social class can be studied as either an individual or a family or household characteristic. In this paper I focus on it as an individual characteristic. Because we are mainly interested in the working class, and I take that class to be best identified through a person's job or their relationship to the means of production, I am not exploring all the ways that class identity might be complicated at the household or family level.

explains, with this type of definition of class, ‘the actual content of these evaluative attributes will vary considerably across time and place. In some contexts, class-as-subjective classification will revolve around life styles, in others around occupations, and in still others around income levels’ (718).

Of course, there are difficulties with this approach. One is that the self-identification question is not necessarily connected to the person’s working conditions or material circumstances. For example, Sosnaud et al. (2013) examined contrasts between subjective class self-identification and what they call indicators of ‘objective’ class position to study vote choice (though the objectiveness of their ‘objective’ measures may be up for debate as well). Another difficulty is that many surveys that ask about subjective social class identification do not include working class as a specific answer. The Pew Research Center, for example, asks respondents, ‘What class do you belong in?’ and offers lower class, lower-middle class, middle class, upper-middle class, and upper class as possible responses, but not working class (Morin and Motel 2012). A further problem is that many surveys and polls—including the US Census Bureau’s Decennial Census and its American Community Survey—do not ask about subjective social class self-identification.²

Education-based Definitions

Educational attainment is an increasingly popular proxy for identifying a person’s social class. Wilson (2016), like many scholars, defines the working class as ‘working people without a college degree’ (1). Douglas Massey also uses educational attainment as a proxy for social class, in his 2007 book *Categorically Unequal*. In an economic context where a college degree is an important attribute in a worker’s labor-market opportunities, there are good reasons for this approach.

However, the education-based definition of the working class obscures both the working conditions of the people being studied and the class relations that shape those conditions. As Metzgar (2003) noted, relying exclusively on an education-based definition can obscure the material circumstances of workers or lead to tiresome debates about variation within the class:

If your definition is based strictly on education, for example, guardians of the middle-class vernacular will mention Bill Gates, who does not have a bachelor’s degree but is a managerial worker and unarguably ‘rich.’ They will mention the social worker with a master’s degree who makes only \$32,000 a year, and the UPS truck driver, an overtime hog, who makes \$100,000 a year. Guardians insist on a precise definition, and then delight in pointing out the exceptions to the rule, attempting to make any discussion of class in America seem ridiculous or tedious (71).

² Self-identification as working class varies substantially across national contexts, too. For example, Graves’ (2018) report, based on surveys in Canada, found that from 2002–2017 the proportion of respondents self-identifying as working class in response to a survey question very similar to the GSS question in the US was typically more than 10% lower than in the US, between about 22% and 37%: similar to the 30% found by some polling in Australia (Moore and Gibson 2018). In contrast, in the 33rd edition of *British Social Attitudes*, Evans and Mellon (2016) showed that a much higher proportion of respondents self-identified as working-class in Britain: more than 60% over roughly the same time period.

Of course, using educational attainment as a class indicator shows how a person's class position can change over time. The category is challenging enough to define, but we should note the significance of timing here. Because much of working-class studies is historical, once you have the boundaries of the class set, it's relatively easy to distinguish who is and is not a member of the working class. But of course, people move between social classes throughout their lives, and many develop a double-consciousness, as they live in multiple class-cultural worlds at the same time. Social-class transitions, and the frictions of negotiating between different class-cultural worlds, are the subject of research that is highly revealing about class boundaries and the social circumstances of each class (Lehmann 2009 2013; Jack 2014; Warnock 2014). Attfield (2016) showed how appeals for respectability applied to working-class people can constrain working-class critiques of injustice and social inequality.

Scholars studying the working class in higher education are especially aware of how tangled a person's college education and social-class identity can be (Hurst 2007, 2010; Warnock and Appel 2012; Jack 2014; Warnock 2014; Lee 2016; Warnock and Hurst 2016; King, Griffith, and Murphy 2017). Hurst (2010) showed that many working-class students from diverse backgrounds took on strategic identities as they navigated college life: loyalists, who maintain commitment to their working-class cultural roots; renegades, who embrace middle-class culture and goals; and double agents, who work to keep a foothold in each world. Also, identifying the working class as all workers who have no college degree contributes to inaccurate stigmatization of the working class as 'uneducated.' So while educational attainment can be a useful indicator of a person's circumstances, it is an awkward indicator of social-class position.

Income and Wealth-based Definitions

This way of examining social class aligns with what Wright (2005) describes as taking class as a person's objective position within a distribution, because these definitions ask, 'How are people *objectively located* in distributions of material inequality?' (2). In these types of class definition, class is used to describe some objectively identifiable characteristics of economic inequality and the person's position in their society's class system. Common examples of this sort of class definition are those based on a person's or family's income or wealth. Reeves and Guyot (2019) at the Brookings Institution, for example, identified their middle-class category as all people in households within the middle 60% of households on the national income distribution. Income, or some combination of income and other assets, such as wealth, can certainly be useful for describing class categories and circumstances. For the working class in particular, though, these indicators don't quite get at a central characteristic that many scholars of working-class studies are most interested in: the work, or how a person generates income through their labor in the labor market.

The Working Class by Occupation Categories

Another way of defining the working class is to aggregate all workers in a particular group of occupations as working class. This is a common practice in working-class studies and other disciplines and interdisciplinary spaces (Nelson 2017; Marambio-Tapia 2018; Wagner 2018). For US workers, job codes are available as a common variable in surveys such as the US Census

Bureau's Decennial Census and the American Community Survey (ACS). This use of occupations to study class position and structure in the US has a long history (Blau and Duncan 1967; Wright 1997; Grusky and Sorensen 1998; Freeland and Hoey 2018; Hout 2018; Zhou and Wodtke 2019).

As Wilson and Roscigno (2018) explain, 'Occupations, in fact, comprise aggregations of jobs – jobs that entail significant variations in workplace roles and accompanying rewards and status' (115). The job code schema used by the Census and ACS includes more than 500 job codes. Table 1 contains these codes and specifies which ones I included for each definition of the working class. Another common practice is to aggregate job codes within one of six major groups: management and professional specialty occupations; precision production, craft, and repair occupations; technical, sales, and administrative support occupations; operators, fabricators, and laborers; services workers; and farming, forestry, and fishing workers. Table 1 includes these standard major occupation groups as headings, and also shows how I coded each job code for each of the three definitions I examine in this paper. Table 2 shows how each definition compares with the six-category standard grouping schema.

I see an alignment between the working class as a conceptual category and occupation-based definitions. Defining a social class by its members' jobs reflects an interest in the context and characteristics of the work and what it means for the people doing those jobs. It means focusing on the individual and their work circumstances. This is a different kind of definition from one that considers cultural associations or other elements beyond the job itself. In common discussion, which jobs are typically considered working-class or not is of course informed by other factors and by cultural norms. Certain job categories have historically been gendered or raced, for example, which then also influences which categories are associated with the working class or not (Cha and Thebaud 2008; Nixon 2009; Aguirre 2017). Income may also vary dramatically across this class category. Occupational-category-based definitions focus on social class as one characteristic, and highlight *how* a person earns a wage and how much autonomy and authority they have in their job.

Zweig's Working-Class Majority

Zweig's 2001 book *The Working Class Majority* laid the foundation in working-class studies for thinking about how to count the working class, and did so by applying a definition based on occupation categories. Zweig examined the detailed occupational content of each job title in the same job codes used by the ACS, and assigned employees to the working, middle, or capitalist class according to how much authority and independence they typically have on the job.

Zweig was also interested in a class definition that reflected relationships and power at work, not just job title, so he went further. He identified that in the professional specialty occupation category, some professionals, such as engineers, doctors, and lawyers, are middle-class 'given the degree of independence and authority they typically have at work' (30). But he also argued that many workers in the same category were working-class, including emergency medical technicians, teacher assistants, and broadcast sound engineers. As he examined more jobs closely, he decided to split portions of several categories into working and middle class. For example, he argued that about 75% of nurses were working-class, based on their work conditions. There certainly are large variations in the conditions and qualifications related to nursing jobs. As Table 1 shows, the job

codes used identify both registered nurses (code 95) and licensed practical nurses (code 207), which are distinct from nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants (code 447). Sorting out these distinctions helps to clarify the boundaries of the working class and what a study means when using this label. While these fine-grained distinctions complicate the story that can be told with any one definition of the working class, we will see below that other scholars make such distinctions in trying to recognize the role of power and relationships in the workplace.

By rooting the definition in occupational standing, and by examining each category of worker's authority and independence, Zweig is taking social class as a 'relational explanation of economic life chance' (Wright 2005). One reason that occupation-based definitions of social class are useful is that the categorical definitions themselves (the jobs that define the categories) reveal the relationship of each worker to the means of production and their degree of independence and authority in their job. These definitions are useful, as Wright (2005) highlights, because they identify 'certain causal mechanisms that help determine salient features of that system [of stratification]' (719). Another reason that occupation-based definitions of social class are popular is because they can more directly reflect people's working conditions. They allow researchers to usefully compare workers across other characteristics, both between and within class categories.

A drawback, however, is that because these definitions are rooted in a person's labor-market status, they usually exclude many people who might be considered working-class based on other characteristics but who are not currently in the labor market (Portes and Sassen-Koob 1987; Jensen, et al. 1995; Alderslade et al. 2006). For example, unemployed people, retired workers, or people working in the informal economy or being paid under the table could all reasonably be considered working-class for reasons beyond their occupation title, but they would not be identified by these types of definitions. Also excluded is the often-invisible domestic care work, much of it done by women, especially care of dependent children and elderly family members (Pernigotti 2010; Thebaud 2010). People who do not enter the labor force because of such responsibilities would be excluded from these definitions of the working class, especially in places without substantial family leave support.

While it is important to understand that there is meaningful variation in working conditions in these occupational categories, Zweig's unique categorization creates difficulties for replication in research. One difficulty is that Zweig does not identify specific working conditions or particular workers that he places in one class or another. So while it is possible for a researcher to allot the same portions of workers from these occupations to the working and middle classes, and then calculate characteristics such as mean or median incomes for each class, it is not possible to meaningfully intersect these class groups with other characteristics, such as industry categories. It is, unfortunately, not possible to know which particular nurses, for example, are to be counted as working-class and which as middle-class.

Metzgar's Working Class

Metzgar's (2003) writing focuses on how we, in broader society, identify and talk about the working class and how we attach meaning and political positions to working-class identity. But he also developed a simple and useful categorical definition of the working class. Metzgar (2003) takes a broad and inclusive view of the working class. The way we think about and discuss the

middle class in our class vernacular, he explains, ‘first hides the working class (by including it within the ubiquitous middle) and then forgets it is there by assuming that almost everybody is college-educated and professional’ (64). He argues that we thereby ‘miss the larger part of the working class that is not blue collar, most importantly clerical, retail sales, and other kinds of ‘service’ workers’ (67).

For Metzgar, then, the working class should be thought of as ‘everybody who does not fully qualify for the smaller, more exclusive ‘middle class’’ (68). He explains that if you define the working class by occupational categories, then ‘Basically, this is everybody who is not in the BLS’s ‘managerial and professional workers’ category’ (68). So for Metzgar, the working class includes all workers in the other five major categories of the standard occupation schema: all workers in precision production, craft, and repair occupations; technical, sales, and administrative support occupations; operators, fabricators, and laborers; services workers; and farming, forestry, and fishing workers (69). Metzgar’s definition is the broadest and most inclusive of the definitions of the US working class considered here, and because it is a simple grouping of major occupation categories, it is relatively easy to work with in terms of replication.

Cohen’s Working Class

While Cohen’s (2001) research investigated a narrow test of how the proportion of black workers in a local labor market shaped class inequality among whites, he developed a thoughtful definition of the working class based on a careful grouping of occupation categories. Cohen is a prominent sociologist whose research focuses on family life, but he has also studied the working class and labor market inequalities (Cohen and Huffman 2003; Cohen 2014).

Cohen (2001) aggregates workers in several occupational categories as the working class, but he removed people in supervisory and managerial positions in several of the six standard occupational categories. Cohen refers to Szymanski’s (1983) definition of the working class, explaining that it is ‘based on relations of production and taking into account structures of authority, so that teachers, blue-collar supervisors, and police, for example, are not included as working class’ (151). Cohen (2001) notes that his definition also ‘roughly parallels the skilled and unskilled workers in Wright’s [1997] typology (that is, all employees less experts, supervisors, and managers)’ (152). As Cohen (2001) explains, ‘In 1990 census categories, this definition of working class includes sales workers (except finance and business services and nonretail commodities); all technical, sales, and administrative support occupations (except supervisors); all service occupations (except protective service); and all nonsupervisory agriculture and blue-collar workers’ (152).

In many ways, Cohen’s (2001) definition of the working class attempted to make the same distinction as Zweig (2001) by separating out workers based on the power and class relations associated with their specific occupation. Like Kalleberg (2010), both Zweig and Cohen recognize that variations in authority create different work conditions and move workers with authority out of the working class. So while Cohen’s and Zweig’s categorizations differ in their particulars, they both aim to sort workers more carefully between the working and middle classes, based particularly on power and class relations. Unlike Zweig, though, in Cohen’s definition each occupational category is wholly allotted to either the working or middle class, rather than splitting

a portion of some of the trickier categories between each class category. For this reason, Cohen's (2001) definition is much more easily and usefully replicable.

The Creative Proletariat

Richard Florida is best known for his writing on the group of workers he calls the creative class, and how he sees their lifestyle preferences remaking city neighborhoods and metropolitan regions (2002). While his paradigm has been highly contested, it remains a popular way of discussing social classes in the new economy. And though his work might not be considered part of the working-class-studies canon, I find some useful ideas in his way of defining social classes.

Florida's (2002) somewhat nebulous definition of the creative class is workers whose primary function in their work is to 'create meaningful new forms' (69). However, like Metzgar (2003) and Cohen (2001), Florida's class categories (2002 pp.68, 73) are operationalized in a very concrete way as an aggregation of occupational codes from the standard classification system. He categorizes workers into his unique class structure: creative class, service class, and working class (with military personnel excluded and agricultural workers considered a separate class).³ In defining his creative class, Florida identifies the super-creative core as a direct recoding of four occupation groups, then adds what he identifies as creative professionals, which includes several other managerial or technical jobs. A unique distinction of Florida's class categories is that he adds what he describes as high-end sales and sales management to his creative class, while placing others sales categories in his service class. Markusen et al. (2008) described Florida's class categories as 'large lumpy occupational categories,' which is, really, an apt description for each of these three categorical definitions of the working class. Florida (2002) argues that this aggregation-based way of categorizing social classes creates economic classes along lines that Weeden and Grusky (2005) might call a 'stylized measure.'

Interestingly, Florida's creative class roughly parallels the non-working classes in Cohen's (2001) and Metzgar's (2003) research. While the working class is not Florida's focus, it is an interesting exercise to invert his class system and examine the workers he excludes from his creative class. As Table 1 shows, this means that combining Florida's working and services classes roughly parallels the working classes of Cohen and Metzgar. Florida's own aggregation that he labels the working class in his schema includes 'Construction and extraction occupations, Installation, maintenance, and repair occupations, Production occupations, and Transportation and material moving occupations' (2002 pp. 328–329). His service class includes 'Healthcare support occupations, Food preparation and food service related occupations, Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance, Personal care and service occupations, Low-end sales and related occupations, Office and administrative support occupations, Community and social services occupations, and Protective service occupations' (ibid.).

³ Florida explains that in his class formulation, members of the creative class share a culture based on their desire to be creative and their place in the economy. In this sense, the creative class definition relates to Weber's (1946) concept of status as class members interact in their social worlds through shared cultural preferences. Florida argues that 'All members of the Creative Class – whether they are artists or engineers, musicians or computer scientists, writers or entrepreneurs – share a common creative ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference, and merit' (8). As he states, their 'social and cultural preferences, consumption and buying habits, and their social identities all flow from this' (68). Of course, many workers in occupations that Florida does not consider to be creative-class may also share these creative inclinations or social and cultural preferences.

I argue elsewhere (King and Crommelin forthcoming 2020) that while Florida's class categories may reasonably dissatisfy many, they may also usefully reflect the new economy framework than the similarly lumpy standard occupational categories (Smith 2001; Nevarez 2002; Sweet 2007; Sweet and Meiksins 2017).⁴ In particular, Florida's class categorization splits the standard category of managerial and professional specialty occupations, and allots those jobs between the super-creative core, creative professionals, and service classes. He includes 'high-end sales and sales management' in his creative class, which implies that only a few sales occupations are in the creative class, while the others are in his service class. But he does not specify which categories are included for each. For my analysis here, I included sales representatives, finance and business services occupations, including insurance, real estate, financial services, and advertising and related sales occupations, as well as sales engineers (code 258) as 'high-end sales and sales management,' and therefore in the creative class. I excluded from the creative class the sales occupational category of sales demonstrators, promoters, and models because they are likely not considered 'high-end' or management, even though their jobs may require some creativity.

Florida's categorization also splits the standard category of technical, sales, and administrative support occupations, allotting a small portion of those jobs among creative professionals while most are aggregated in the service class. We can set aside questions of creativity (and Florida's contention that these jobs drive economic growth and their workers promote tolerance) and see that the super-creative core and creative professionals occupation categories reflect jobs that are commonly understood as 'new economy' jobs (Smith 2001; Nevarez 2002; Sweet 2007; Sweet and Meiksins 2017).⁵ Also, by combining low-end sales and administrative support jobs with standard service occupations, this categorization schema highlights the shared circumstances of workers in these jobs. Florida's working-class occupation category is a straightforward combination of the standard precision production, craft, and repair occupation with the standard operators, fabricators, and laborers occupation. Interestingly, the non-creative-class workers in Florida's aggregation (i.e. Florida's service, working, and agricultural classes combined) overlaps substantially with Metzgar's (2003) and Cohen's (2001) definitions of working class.

Is there an appropriate label for the group of all workers not considered in the 'creative class' by Florida? Florida (2002) suggests that workers outside of creative-class occupations are seeing their work 'de-creativized' by automation and other changes in working conditions (71). Some may therefore be tempted to label these workers as the 'non-creative class,' but that label does not work for me. Even workers engaged in the most rote activities find ways to be creative in their work. But in the context of the new economy, it could be said that these workers lack access to the means of 'creating meaningful new forms,' at least in their jobs at work. So I suggest the label of 'creative proletariat' for all workers outside of the creative class in Florida's system.

⁴ Florida's (2012 p. 40) calculations show substantial differences between his creative class and the group of all workers with a college degree. There is also substantial evidence that his creative class category is not the clear proxy for educational attainment that some have understood it to be (Stolarick and Currid-Halkett 2013).

⁵ If the new creative economy is taken as the defining economic system of our time, perhaps it is reasonable to consider the usefulness of Florida's conception of social class. Rather than class relations being understood as between owners (or supervisors) and workers, they could be understood in this way as between those who possess creative skills *and* the job positions in which to deploy them, and those who do not possess both of these things. For these reasons, I think it can be useful to combine Florida's working and service classes, and reasonable to add agricultural workers (at least those who are not owners or managers), into a class category understood to be in a contrasting class position from the creative class in the new economy.

Summary of these Three Occupation Aggregation Definitions

Comparing these three occupation aggregation definitions of the working class, we see interesting similarities and differences. For example, sales engineers are counted in the working class in the Cohen and Metzgar typologies, but not in the Florida typology outlined here. The sales occupational category of sales demonstrators, promoters, and models is considered working-class in all three major aggregations. Interestingly, the inclusion of community and social service occupations in Florida's categorization means that Florida's service class also includes social workers, recreation workers, and clergy and religious workers (codes 174, 175, and 176), which neither Cohen nor Metzgar includes in the working class. Metzgar and Florida include protective service occupations (everyone from police and fire fighters to cross guards and doorkeepers) as part of their working or service class, while Cohen excludes these workers in recognition of their authority and social prestige.

More broadly, because any of these three definitions of the working class is based on a worker's specific job title, these definitions include real information about the kind of work that a person is doing. This information is not as apparent when a researcher is using another of the definitions described above. But, of course, none of these definitions tell us everything about each worker's working conditions, and there are many reasons to expect substantial variations even within any particular job category.

Data and Methods

To examine the characteristics of the members of each of these definitions of the working class, I collected the 1% sample from the 2017 American Community Survey (ACS through the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 8.0 (IPUMS) (Ruggles et al. 2018). I used the PERWT variable to weight the sample to ensure the dataset is nationally representative for person-level analyses. I did not narrow the sample down to a 'prime age' group of workers, so the data includes workers aged 16–93.⁶ Unlike other employment data sources (including the Bureau of Labor Statistics), ACS data provides both occupation and industry-category information for individual respondents, which is useful for examining cross-sections of these employment groups. The full count of employed people represented in this data is 155,057,257.

For this analysis, I use the IPUMS format for the US Census Bureau's 1990 occupational schema.⁷ More recent categorization schemas are available, and crosswalks have been created to allow historical comparison (Morgan, 2017). However, because the categorical definitions that are of interest here were formulated based on the occupation-categorization schema reported by IPUMS with the OCC1990 variable, I applied the OCC1990 schema here as well.

Comparing these Three Working-Class Operationalizations

Size and Distributions

⁶ Age is top-coded at age 93.

⁷ For both the ACS and the Decennial Census, respondents with multiple jobs report the job that they earn the most money from or spend the most time at.

Examining Table 2, we can see that all three operationalizations for the working class identify these workers as a clear majority of people with jobs. Metzgar's definition is the broadest, and counts just over 66.7% (103,487,634 of 155,057,257) of the employed labor force as working class. Cohen's narrower definition is the smallest, identifying about 57.7% as working class. The creative proletariat definition lies between them, at about 61.4%.

Table 2 shows how each definition overlays with the six-category standard occupation grouping. Metzgar's is the simplest, identifying all workers in managerial and professional specialty occupations as non-working-class, and all workers in all five other categories as working-class. Table 2 also shows how Cohen's definition moves some workers from four of the other standard occupation categories (technical, sales, and admin; support; service; farming, forestry, and fishing; and precision production, craft, and repair occupations) into non-working class. Compared to Metzgar's definition, in Cohen's grouping, technical, sales, and administrative support occupations contribute the most additional workers to the non-working-class category, while each definition identifies all operators, fabricators, and laborers as working-class. The creative proletariat definition moves 10,222,595 workers from technical, sales, and administrative support occupations into the creative-class category, but, like Metzgar's definition, counts as working-class all workers in service; farming, forestry, and fishing; precision production, craft, and repair; and operators, fabricators, and laborers occupations.

While the intersections of these three definitions with the standard occupational categories are relatively simple, their intersections with standard industry categories are more complex. Through Table 3 we can examine how the working class (and the non-working class) is distributed across 13 standard industry categories. Many observers associate the working class with the manufacturing industry, and we see here that 11–12% of the working class (and a little over 8% of the non-working class) are in the manufacturing industry according to all three definitions. If you combine all of the working class in the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, as well as the mining and construction industries with those in the manufacturing industry, you get almost 25% of the working class labor force for all three definitions.

Which industries are underrepresented among the working class? Across all three definitions, the working class makes up around 20% of the professional and related services industry, while that industry is 42.44–52.37% of the non-working class, depending on the definition. Interestingly, despite the careful distinctions made by Cohen and Florida to remove workers with autonomy, authority, or creative responsibilities at work from the working class, we see here that patterns of industry distribution are roughly similar across all three definitions. One industry that does not follow this pattern is business and repair services. Following Metzgar's definition, this industry is a larger proportion of the working class than the non-working class (7.16% to 6.69%), but the reverse is true for Cohen's definition and the creative proletariat (6.88% to 7.16%, and 6.48% to 7.83%, respectively).

One industry that shows a large contrast between the working and non-working classes is retail trade. Retail trade makes almost 24% of the working class in both Metzgar's and Cohen's definitions, and more than 22% of the creative proletariat. The retail trade industry is more than 10% of the non-working class only if you adopt the creative-class definition, where it is 10.25%

of the creative class. The high proportion of the working class in the retail industry underscores recent discussions in this journal (Nelson 2017; Marambio-Tapia 2018).

Descriptive Statistics for Each Working Class

Table 4 reports descriptive statistics for each of these definitions of the working class. Metzgar's working class reports the highest mean and median incomes for individuals (\$36,169.38 and \$27,400).⁸ The creative proletariat reports the closest mean and median individual incomes (\$32,871.27 and \$25,900), suggesting that incomes for this group are the least skewed by high-income outliers.

According to IPUMS, the poverty variable expresses each family's total income for the previous year as a percentage of the poverty thresholds established by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and revised in 1980, adjusted for inflation. These family numbers are also used to report the poverty status for each individual. I calculated the proportion of individuals in families with incomes less than two times the poverty level, and we see that more than 25% of the working class lived below twice the poverty line in 2017.

Metzgar's definition includes the largest proportion of the working class with a college degree, at about 17.69%; Cohen's definition and the creative proletariat report about 15.7%. While some would identify only people without a college degree as working class (as discussed above), it is important to note that more than one in seven members of the working class have earned a college degree according to any of the three definitions. These are higher numbers than might be expected, especially given that some of these people have not yet had a chance to earn a college degree, since the workforce as defined here includes many people under common ages for college graduation for traditional students.

Is the Working Class White, Male, Rural, and Old?

In the US, much national news reporting discusses the working class almost exclusively in terms of political persuasions, and almost always frames it as white and male (also as rural and in manufacturing). For example, in the lead-up to the 2016 presidential election, Khalid (2016) for *NPR* looked at the relationship between the white working class and the Republican party, while Brownstein (2019) for *The Atlantic* wrote an article describing 'The Diverse Left and White Working-Class Right.' Many scholars and commentators involved in working-class studies, such as Russo and Linkon (2016) and Francis (2018) have worked to dispel the overgeneralized stereotypes that emerge from such coverage. But given how news reports discussing the working class focus on the white working class in manufacturing, you might begin to imagine that the working class is white, male, rural, and old (Morgan and Lee 2017; Mathur and Kasmir 2018). Critiques of this view have also proliferated, however. In fact, back in 2003 Metzgar argued that this view of the working class is overly nostalgic. He explained that 'the 'blue collar' and 'thing of the past' connotations of 'working class' (sometimes accompanied by stereotypes of a white, male Joe Six-Pack) also restrict us, both from talking sensibly and from really challenging the existing vernacular' (67).

⁸ Individual wage and salary income is top-coded at the 99.5% percentile for each person's state, with higher amounts coded as the state means of values above the listed top code value for that specific Census year.

These numbers illustrate how the stereotype of the working class as white, male, rural, uneducated, and old is misleading and inaccurate. While this data includes all workers, even those aged 16–25, in each definition more than 15% of the working class has earned a college degree. Across all three definitions, more than 12.5% of the working class is non-Hispanic black, and more than 20.8% of the working class is Hispanic (compared to 11.36% and 17.17% of the total labor force, respectively). Regardless of definition, more than 10% of the working class are non-citizens, about twice the proportion among the non-working class. It is true that in each of the three definitions, most of the working class are white, but the working class is consistently less white than the non-working class across these definitions. Also, all three definitions report mean ages of 40.5–41 years, just below the mean age for the whole workforce, 41.96 years. Across all three definitions, the working class is a little more than half male, and also a percentage or two more male than the overall labor force. But, many occupations within the working class are female dominated, and women are nearly half of the overall working class reflect, so neither gender can claim the working class as its own.

The geographic distribution of the working class also shows greater diversity than might be expected. Using the metropolitan-status variable to identify respondents' geographies, I found that more of the working class lived in central cities than lived outside of metropolitan regions (over 8% and then over 10%, respectively, across all three definitions). This variable is tricky to work with, partly because among this sample, 12.3% of all cases had an indeterminable metropolitan status, and 42.5% had an unknown central-city status. We can identify spaces in metropolitan regions but outside of central cities as a proxy for 'suburbs,' and if we do this here, we find that among all workers with known metropolitan status across the three definitions, over 90% live in a metropolitan region, and about 90% of those live outside of the central city. Across all the definitions, then, we see that the working class is more diverse and dynamic than conventional wisdom suggests.

Maybe We're (almost) All Working-Class?

Because there are so many disparate definitions of the working class, many of them count people as working class while others would exclude them. What happens if we group all workers who would be identified as working class by any several of these definitions? While each definition largely overlaps with the others, seeing how large the group of workers becomes when you add together every worker included by at least one definition reveals just how many workers in the US are in precarious work circumstances, and how much these workers have in common.

In Table 5 I report descriptive statistics for all workers in a new working-class variable that includes any person who would be identified as working class based on any of these broad definitions. I included all workers who are working-class because they work in an occupation identified as working-class by Metzgar or Cohen, or are a part of the creative proletariat, and then I added all workers who have less than a bachelor's degree and all workers who live at or below 200% of the poverty level (regardless of occupation). This very broad definition of the working class includes 122,773,708 workers, or 79.18% of the entire workforce. This way of identifying the working class moves the descriptive statistics in directions that some would argue look less like the working class, as the mean and median individual wage and salary incomes are higher for

this group than all three categorical definitions, and the proportion of workers in this group with a college degree is higher than the three narrower, occupation-based definitions.

Still, the exercise shows just how many workers might reasonably be identified as working-class by at least one definition. More than three quarters of all workers in the US can reasonably claim working-class status by at least one of these definitions (regardless of their self-identification). Does that render the category meaningless? I would argue no—instead, it provides another illustration of just how large a proportion of the workforce in today’s labor market is marginalized, one way or another.

Discussion

This descriptive summary comparing the characteristics of the working class between three categorical definitions could underpin several threads of further analysis. One thread would be to update and align each definition with the 2010 occupation codes. While crosswalks have been created to update each category, it would be useful to have a specific list of all occupations from the 2010 schema identified for each definition (Morgan 2017). Another thread would be to analyze more deeply how well each definition captures what working-class-studies scholars mean when we use this label to describe characteristics of workers in this class. Does Metzgar’s broad definition usefully capture the range of working conditions and material circumstances we are interested in? Is Cohen’s more useful because of its narrow precision? Does the creative-proletariat grouping better capture something about work circumstances in the new economy?

The working class has changed substantially over time, and more research that examines these changes would be useful. Identifying when retail workers became a predominant group in the working class, for example, would be enlightening. Ongoing discussion about who are counted among the working class is an important practice in working-class studies (Linkon 2008). So is engaging with scholars across disciplines about how to count the working class and, critically, what those definitions imply about the class and their circumstances.

Further examination of the characteristics of the ‘mismatched’ workers, who are working class by one definition but not by another, could be a productive line of research. What do we see if we look specifically at those in working-class jobs who also have a college degree, or those without a college degree in middle-class jobs? What about individuals whose class position has changed over time, either because of their mobility in the labor market or their educational attainment, or some other change? One thread I am particularly interested in is the intersection of geography and working-class categorization. For example, what do we see if we compare the working class of the city center with those who live outside of metropolitan regions? We could also explore more deeply which cities, metropolitan regions, or even rural areas have larger or smaller proportions of working-class workers, and why. Of course, comparisons across national borders would be informative as well. We know that while working class subjective self-identification is relatively consistent over time in each country, the proportions of people self-identifying as working class are quite different between the US, Canada, and the UK. It could be informative to examine a broader set of national contexts and study to what extent these differences emerge from contrasts in labor market structures or cultural differences in the meanings associated with working class identification.

While there are several directions for future research to explore further, this descriptive comparison of three occupation-category-based definitions of the working class clarifies the differences in these definitions, and gives a sense of who we're counting when we count the working class. We see how Cohen creates a narrower definition of the working class than Metzgar, by removing supervisory occupations from the category. We see that Florida's creative-class social-class schema, for all its imperfections, could be usefully inverted to examine what I call the creative proletariat—or workers who cannot access the so-called creative-class jobs that he associates with new-economy opportunities. Moreover, we also see that working-class across all three of these dimensions, include a diverse and dynamic group of workers, and a group of people more complex and interesting than you or I might otherwise have expected.

Author Bio

Colby King teaches and studies social class, stratification and inequality, urban sociology, sociology of work, and strategies for supporting working-class and first-generation college students. He has served as a member of the Working-Class Studies Association's Steering Committee, is a member of the American Sociological Association's [Task Force](#) on Working-Class and First Generation Persons in Sociology, and is a [regular contributor](#) for the *Everyday Sociology* Blog. He is headed back to Appalachia, and will begin working as an Assistant Professor of Sociology at USC-Upstate in August 2019, after six years of work, and being tenured and promoted, at Bridgewater State University.

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Appendix

Table 1. Occ1990 Codes included in each Categorical Definition

Standard Occupation Categories are identified with ALL CAPS headings. Also, w=included in wc and both s and w included in creative proletariat. Managerial and Professional Specialty Occupations which are not included in either of these three definitions have been excluded from the table (Codes 3 through 173, and 178-200).

Code	Label	Metzgar	Cohen	Creative Proletariat
	MANAGERIAL AND PROFESSIONAL SPECIALTY OCCUPATIONS			
	Executive, Administrative, and Managerial Occupations: <i>...Occupations coded 3-173 excluded from table...</i>			
	Social, Recreation, and Religious Workers:			
174	Social workers			s
175	Recreation workers			s
176	Clergy and religious workers			s
	<i>...Occupations coded 178-200 excluded from table...</i>			
	TECHNICAL, SALES, AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT OCCUPATIONS			
	Technicians and Related Support Occupations			
	Health Technologists and Technicians:			
203	Clinical laboratory technologies and technicians	w	w	s
204	Dental hygienists	w	w	s
205	Health record tech specialists	w	w	s
206	Radiologic tech specialists	w	w	s
207	Licensed practical nurses	w	w	s
208	Health technologists and technicians, n.e.c.	w	w	s
	Technologists and Technicians, Except Health			
	Engineering and Related Technologists and Technicians:			
213	Electrical and electronic (engineering) technicians	w	w	
214	Engineering technicians, n.e.c.	w	w	
215	Mechanical engineering technicians	w	w	
217	Drafters	w	w	
218	Surveyors, cartographers, mapping scientists and technicians	w	w	
223	Biological technicians	w	w	
	Science Technicians:			
224	Chemical technicians	w	w	
225	Other science technicians	w	w	
	Technicians, Except Health, Engineering, and Science:			
226	Airplane pilots and navigators	w	w	
227	Air traffic controllers	w	w	
228	Broadcast equipment operators	w	w	

229	Computer software developers	w	w	
233	Programmers of numerically controlled machine tools	w	w	
234	Legal assistants, paralegals, legal support, etc.	w	w	
235	Technicians, n.e.c.	w	w	
	Sales Occupations:			
243	Supervisors and proprietors of sales jobs	w		
	Sales Representatives, Finance and Business Services:			
253	Insurance sales occupations	w		
254	Real estate sales occupations	w		
255	Financial services sales occupations	w		
256	Advertising and related sales jobs	w		
	Sales Representatives, Commodities:			
258	Sales engineers	w	w	
274	Salespersons, n.e.c.	w	w	s
275	Retail sales clerks	w	w	s
276	Cashiers	w	w	s
277	Door-to-door sales, street sales, and news vendors	w	w	s
	Sales Related Occupations:			
283	Sales demonstrators / promoters / models	w	w	s
	Administrative Support Occupations, Including Clerical			
	Supervisors, Administrative Support Occupations:			
303	Office supervisors	w		s
	Computer Equipment Operators:			
308	Computer and peripheral equipment operators	w	w	s
	Secretaries, Stenographers, and Typists:			
313	Secretaries	w	w	s
314	Stenographers	w	w	s
315	Typists	w	w	s
	Information Clerks:			
316	Interviewers, enumerators, and surveyors	w	w	s
317	Hotel clerks	w	w	s
318	Transportation ticket and reservation agents	w	w	s
319	Receptionists	w	w	s
323	Information clerks, n.e.c	w	w	s
	Records Processing Occupations, Except Financial:			
326	Correspondence and order clerks	w	w	s
328	Human resources clerks, except payroll and timekeeping	w	w	s
329	Library assistants	w	w	s
335	File clerks	w	w	s
336	Records clerks	w	w	s
	Financial Records Processing Occupations:			
337	Bookkeepers and accounting and auditing clerks	w	w	s
338	Payroll and timekeeping clerks	w	w	s
343	Cost and rate clerks (financial records processing)	w	w	s

344	Billing clerks and related financial records processing	w	w	s
	Duplicating, Mail, and Other Office Machine Operators:			
345	Duplication machine operators / office machine operators	w	w	s
346	Mail and paper handlers	w	w	s
347	Office machine operators, n.e.c.	w	w	s
	Communications Equipment Operators:			
348	Telephone operators	w	w	s
349	Other telecom operators	w	w	s
	Mail and Message Distributing Occupations:			
354	Postal clerks, excluding mail carriers	w	w	s
355	Mail carriers for postal service	w	w	s
356	Mail clerks, outside of post office	w	w	s
357	Messengers	w	w	s
	Material Recording, Scheduling, and Distributing Clerks:			
359	Dispatchers	w	w	s
361	Inspectors, n.e.c.	w	w	s
364	Shipping and receiving clerks	w	w	s
365	Stock and inventory clerks	w	w	s
366	Meter readers	w	w	s
368	Weighers, measurers, and checkers	w	w	s
373	Material recording, scheduling, production, planning, and expediting clerks	w	w	s
	Adjusters and Investigators:			
375	Insurance adjusters, examiners, and investigators	w	w	s
376	Customer service reps, investigators and adjusters, except insurance	w	w	s
377	Eligibility clerks for government programs; social welfare	w	w	s
378	Bill and account collectors	w	w	s
	Miscellaneous Administrative Support Occupations:		w	
379	General office clerks	w	w	s
383	Bank tellers	w	w	s
384	Proofreaders	w	w	s
385	Data entry keyers	w	w	s
386	Statistical clerks	w	w	s
387	Teacher's aides	w	w	s
389	Administrative support jobs, n.e.c.	w	w	s
	SERVICE OCCUPATIONS			
	Private Household Occupations:			
405	Housekeepers, maids, butlers, stewards, and lodging quarters cleaners	w	w	s
407	Private household cleaners and servants	w	w	s
	Protective Service Occupations			
	Supervisors, Protective Service Occupations:			
415	Supervisors of guards	w		s
	Firefighting and Fire Prevention Occupations:			

417	Fire fighting, prevention, and inspection	w		s
	Police and Detectives:			
418	Police, detectives, and private investigators	w		s
423	Other law enforcement: sheriffs, bailiffs, correctional institution officers	w		s
	Guards:			
425	Crossing guards and bridge tenders	w		s
426	Guards, watchmen, doorkeepers	w		s
427	Protective services, n.e.c.	w		s
	Service Occupations, Except Protective and Household			
	Food Preparation and Service Occupations:			
434	Bartenders	w	w	s
435	Waiter/waitress	w	w	s
436	Cooks, variously defined	w	w	s
438	Food counter and fountain workers	w	w	s
439	Kitchen workers	w	w	s
443	Waiter's assistant	w	w	s
444	Misc. food prep workers	w	w	s
	Health Service Occupations:			
445	Dental assistants	w	w	s
446	Health aides, except nursing	w	w	s
447	Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants	w	w	s
	Cleaning and Building Service Occupations, Except Households:			
448	Supervisors of cleaning and building service	w		s
453	Janitors	w	w	s
454	Elevator operators	w	w	s
455	Pest control occupations	w	w	s
	Personal Service Occupations:			
456	Supervisors of personal service jobs, n.e.c.	w		s
457	Barbers	w	w	s
458	Hairdressers and cosmetologists	w	w	s
459	Recreation facility attendants	w	w	s
461	Guides	w	w	s
462	Ushers	w	w	s
463	Public transportation attendants and inspectors	w	w	s
464	Baggage porters	w	w	s
465	Welfare service aides	w	w	s
468	Child care workers	w	w	s
469	Personal service occupations, n.e.c	w	w	s
	FARMING, FORESTRY, AND FISHING OCCUPATIONS			
	Farm Operators and Managers:			
473	Farmers (owners and tenants)	w		
474	Horticultural specialty farmers	w		
475	Farm managers, except for horticultural farms	w		
476	Managers of horticultural specialty farms	w		

	Other Agricultural and Related Occupations:			
	Farm Occupations, Except Managerial:			
479	Farm workers	w	w	
483	Marine life cultivation workers	w	w	
484	Nursery farming workers	w	w	
	Related Agricultural Occupations:			
485	Supervisors of agricultural occupations	w		
486	Gardeners and groundskeepers	w	w	
487	Animal caretakers except on farms	w	w	
488	Graders and sorters of agricultural products	w	w	
489	Inspectors of agricultural products	w	w	
	Forestry and Logging Occupations:			
496	Timber, logging, and forestry workers	w	w	
	Fishers, Hunters, and Trappers:			
498	Fishers, hunters, and kindred	w	w	
	PRECISION PRODUCTION, CRAFT, AND REPAIR OCCUPATIONS			
	Mechanics and Repairers:			
503	Supervisors of mechanics and repairers	w		w
	Mechanics and Repairers, Except Supervisors			
	Vehicle and Mobile Equipment Mechanics and Repairers:			
505	Automobile mechanics	w	w	w
507	Bus, truck, and stationary engine mechanics	w	w	w
508	Aircraft mechanics	w	w	w
509	Small engine repairers	w	w	w
514	Auto body repairers	w	w	w
516	Heavy equipment and farm equipment mechanics	w	w	w
518	Industrial machinery repairers	w	w	w
519	Machinery maintenance occupations	w	w	w
	Electrical and Electronic Equipment Repairers:		w	
523	Repairers of industrial electrical equipment	w	w	w
525	Repairers of data processing equipment	w	w	w
526	Repairers of household appliances and power tools	w	w	w
527	Telecom and line installers and repairers	w	w	w
533	Repairers of electrical equipment, n.e.c.	w	w	w
534	Heating, air conditioning, and refrigeration mechanics	w	w	w
	Miscellaneous Mechanics and Repairers:			
535	Precision makers, repairers, and smiths	w	w	w
536	Locksmiths and safe repairers	w	w	w
538	Office machine repairers and mechanics	w	w	w
539	Repairers of mechanical controls and valves	w	w	w
543	Elevator installers and repairers	w	w	w
544	Millwrights	w	w	w
549	Mechanics and repairers, n.e.c.	w	w	w
	Construction Trades			

	Supervisors, Construction Occupations:			
558	Supervisors of construction work	w		w
	Construction Trades, Except Supervisors:			
563	Masons, tilers, and carpet installers	w	w	w
567	Carpenters	w	w	w
573	Drywall installers	w	w	w
575	Electricians	w	w	w
577	Electric power installers and repairers	w	w	w
579	Painters, construction and maintenance	w	w	w
583	Paperhangers	w	w	w
584	Plasterers	w	w	w
585	Plumbers, pipe fitters, and steamfitters	w	w	w
588	Concrete and cement workers	w	w	w
589	Glaziers	w	w	w
593	Insulation workers	w	w	w
594	Paving, surfacing, and tamping equipment operators	w	w	w
595	Roofers and slaters	w	w	w
596	Sheet metal duct installers	w	w	w
597	Structural metal workers	w	w	w
598	Drillers of earth	w	w	w
599	Construction trades, n.e.c.	w	w	w
	Extractive Occupations:			
614	Drillers of oil wells	w	w	w
615	Explosives workers	w	w	w
616	Miners	w	w	w
617	Other mining occupations	w	w	w
	Precision Production Occupations:			
628	Production supervisors or foremen	w		w
	Precision Metal Working Occupations:			
634	Tool and die makers and die setters	w	w	w
637	Machinists	w	w	w
643	Boilermakers	w	w	w
644	Precision grinders and filers	w	w	w
645	Patternmakers and model makers	w	w	w
646	Lay-out workers	w	w	w
649	Engravers	w	w	w
653	Tinsmiths, coppersmiths, and sheet metal workers	w	w	w
	Precision Woodworking Occupations:			
657	Cabinetmakers and bench carpenters	w	w	w
658	Furniture and wood finishers	w	w	w
659	Other precision woodworkers	w	w	w
	Precision Textile, Apparel, and Furnishings Machine Workers:			
666	Dressmakers and seamstresses	w	w	w
667	Tailors	w	w	w

668	Upholsterers	w	w	w
669	Shoe repairers	w	w	w
674	Other precision apparel and fabric workers	w	w	w
	Precision Workers, Assorted Materials:			
675	Hand molders and shapers, except jewelers	w	w	w
677	Optical goods workers	w	w	w
678	Dental laboratory and medical appliance technicians	w	w	w
679	Bookbinders	w	w	w
684	Other precision and craft workers	w	w	w
	Precision Food Production Occupations:			
686	Butchers and meat cutters	w	w	w
687	Bakers	w	w	w
688	Batch food makers	w	w	w
	Precision Inspectors, Testers, and Related Workers:			
693	Adjusters and calibrators	w	w	w
	Plant and System Operators:			
694	Water and sewage treatment plant operators	w	w	w
695	Power plant operators	w	w	w
696	Plant and system operators, stationary engineers	w	w	w
699	Other plant and system operators	w	w	w
	OPERATORS, FABRICATORS, AND LABORERS			
	Machine Operators, Assemblers, and Inspectors			
	Machine Operators and Tenders, Except Precision			
	Metal Working and Plastic Working Machine Operators:			
703	Lathe, milling, and turning machine operatives	w	w	w
706	Punching and stamping press operatives	w	w	w
707	Rollers, roll hands, and finishers of metal	w	w	w
708	Drilling and boring machine operators	w	w	w
709	Grinding, abrading, buffing, and polishing workers	w	w	w
713	Forge and hammer operators	w	w	w
717	Fabricating machine operators, n.e.c.	w	w	w
	Metal and Plastic Processing Machine Operators:			
719	Molders, and casting machine operators	w	w	w
723	Metal platers	w	w	w
724	Heat treating equipment operators	w	w	w
	Woodworking Machine Operators:			
726	Wood lathe, routing, and planing machine operators	w	w	w
727	Sawing machine operators and sawyers	w	w	w
728	Shaping and joining machine operator (woodworking)	w	w	w
729	Nail and tacking machine operators (woodworking)	w	w	w
733	Other woodworking machine operators	w	w	w
	Printing Machine Operators:			
734	Printing machine operators, n.e.c.	w	w	w
735	Photoengravers and lithographers	w	w	w

736	Typesetters and compositors	w	w	w
	Textile, Apparel, and Furnishings Machine Operators:			
738	Winding and twisting textile/apparel operatives	w	w	w
739	Knitters, loopers, and toppers textile operatives	w	w	w
743	Textile cutting machine operators	w	w	w
744	Textile sewing machine operators	w	w	w
745	Shoemaking machine operators	w	w	w
747	Pressing machine operators (clothing)	w	w	w
748	Laundry workers	w	w	w
749	Misc. textile machine operators	w	w	w
	Machine Operators, Assorted Materials:			
753	Cementing and gluing machine operators	w	w	w
754	Packers, fillers, and wrappers	w	w	w
755	Extruding and forming machine operators	w	w	w
756	Mixing and blending machine operatives	w	w	w
757	Separating, filtering, and clarifying machine operators	w	w	w
759	Painting machine operators	w	w	w
763	Roasting and baking machine operators (food)	w	w	w
764	Washing, cleaning, and pickling machine operators	w	w	w
765	Paper folding machine operators	w	w	w
766	Furnace, kiln, and oven operators, apart from food	w	w	w
768	Crushing and grinding machine operators	w	w	w
769	Slicing and cutting machine operators	w	w	w
773	Motion picture projectionists	w	w	w
774	Photographic process workers	w	w	w
779	Machine operators, n.e.c.	w	w	w
	Fabricators, Assemblers, and Hand Working Occupations:			
783	Welders and metal cutters	w	w	w
784	Solderers	w	w	w
785	Assemblers of electrical equipment	w	w	w
789	Hand painting, coating, and decorating occupations	w	w	w
	Production Inspectors, Testers, Samplers, and Weighers:			
796	Production checkers and inspectors	w	w	w
799	Graders and sorters in manufacturing	w	w	w
	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations			
	Motor Vehicle Operators:			
803	Supervisors of motor vehicle transportation	w	w	w
804	Truck, delivery, and tractor drivers	w	w	w
808	Bus drivers	w	w	w
809	Taxi cab drivers and chauffeurs	w	w	w
813	Parking lot attendants	w	w	w
	Transportation Occupations, Except Motor Vehicles			
	Rail Transportation Occupations:			
823	Railroad conductors and yardmasters	w	w	w

824	Locomotive operators (engineers and firemen)	w	w	w
825	Railroad brake, coupler, and switch operators	w	w	w
	Water Transportation Occupations:			
829	Ship crews and marine engineers	w	w	w
834	Water transport infrastructure tenders and crossing guards	w	w	w
	Material Moving Equipment Operators:			
844	Operating engineers of construction equipment	w	w	w
848	Crane, derrick, winch, and hoist operators	w	w	w
853	Excavating and loading machine operators	w	w	w
859	Misc. material moving occupations	w	w	w
	Helpers, Construction and Extractive Occupations:			
865	Helpers, constructions	w	w	w
866	Helpers, surveyors	w	w	w
869	Construction laborers	w	w	w
874	Production helpers	w	w	w
	Freight, Stock, and Material Handlers:			
875	Garbage and recyclable material collectors	w	w	w
876	Materials movers: stevedores and longshore workers	w	w	w
877	Stock handlers	w	w	w
878	Machine feeders and offbearers	w	w	w
883	Freight, stock, and materials handlers	w	w	w
885	Garage and service station related occupations	w	w	w
887	Vehicle washers and equipment cleaners	w	w	w
888	Packers and packagers by hand	w	w	w
889	Laborers outside construction	w	w	w
	MILITARY OCCUPATIONS			
	<i>... Individuals in Occupations coded 905-999 excluded from data set...</i>			
905	Military			
	EXPERIENCED UNEMPLOYED NOT CLASSIFIED BY OCCUPATION			
991	Unemployed			
999	N/A and unknown			

Notes:

According to my interpretation of Cohen's categories, famers (owners and tenants) (code 473) and horticultural specialty farmers (code 474) are not included in working class. In aligning with Florida's categorization, I have also taken 'management occupations' as creative professionals and interpreted as the 'management related occupations' in the coding, and also did not include managers in working and service class occupations. Additionally, in attempting to align with Florida's definition, I interpreted 'Sales demonstrators / promoters / models' (Code 283) as service class here, and not the 'high-end sales and sales management' that Florida refers to.

IPUMS website explains that, 'The census occupation classification system changed markedly in 2000, so the correspondence of ACS occupation codes to the 1950 categories is more

problematic than for earlier census years. Researchers interested in the period from 1980 to the present should consider using OCC1990. OCC1990 codes occupations into a simplified version of the 1990 occupational coding scheme. The OCC1950 and OCC1990 classifications have corresponding occupational standing measures recorded in the variables SEI, HWSEI, NPBOSS50, NPBOSS90, PRESGL, PRENT, EDSCOR50, EDSCOR90, ERSCOR50, ERSCOR90, and OCCSCORE. Our essay on 'Integrated Occupation and Industry codes and Occupational Standing Variables in the IPUMS' describes how we construct harmonized occupational variables as well as occupational standing variables.' **Table 2. Standard Occupation Categories by Three Definitions of the Working Class, employed workers in ACS 2017**

Standard Occupation Categories	Metzgar		Cohen		Florida	
	WC	nonWC	WC	nonWC	Creative Proletariat	Creative Class
<i>Managerial & Professional Specialty</i>	0	51,569,623	0	51,569,623	1,950,578	49,619,045
<i>Technical, sales & admin. support</i>	42,594,096	0	34,790,588	7,803,508	32,371,501	10,222,595
<i>Service</i>	25,801,570	0	22,241,598	3,559,972	25,801,570	0
<i>Farming, forestry & fishing</i>	3,409,611	0	2,702,588	707,023	3,409,611	0
<i>Precision production, craft & repair</i>	13,510,699	0	11,479,225	2,031,474	13,510,699	0
<i>Operators, fabricators & laborers</i>	18,171,658	0	18,171,658	0	18,171,658	0
Total	103,487,634	51,569,623	89,385,657	65,671,600	95,215,617	59,841,640

Table 3. Employment in Industry Categories by Three Definitions of the Working Class, employed workers in ACS 2017

Industry	WC by Metzgar		WC by Cohen		WC by Metzgar		WC by Cohen	
	Working Class	% of WC	Non-Working Class	% of non-WC	Working Class	% of WC	Non-Working Class	% of non-WC
<i>Ag, Forestry, Fisheries</i>	3,273,527	3.16	246,440	0.48	2,562,650	2.87	957,317	1.46
<i>Mining</i>	529,575	0.51	196,526	0.38	453,407	0.51	272,694	0.42
<i>Construction</i>	8,453,347	8.17	1,807,516	3.51	7,618,874	8.52	2,641,989	4.02
<i>Manufacturing</i>	11,617,789	11.23	4,403,165	8.54	10,612,877	11.87	5,408,077	8.24
<i>Public Utilities</i>	8,942,172	8.64	1,944,717	3.77	8,481,461	9.49	2,405,428	3.66
<i>Wholesale Trade</i>	2,919,302	2.82	705,740	1.37	2,697,029	3.02	1,296,528	1.97
<i>Retail Trade</i>	24,588,949	23.76	2,919,302	5.66	21,245,821	23.77	6,262,430	9.54
<i>FIRE</i>	5,645,211	5.45	4,374,203	8.48	3,325,768	3.72	6,693,646	10.19
<i>Business and Repair Services</i>	7,405,481	7.16	3,449,856	6.69	6,150,587	6.88	4,704,750	7.16
<i>Personal Services</i>	4,545,371	4.39	805,650	1.56	4,277,587	4.79	1,073,434	1.63
<i>Entertainment and Recreation Services</i>	1,640,670	1.59	1,077,245	2.09	1,441,186	1.61	1,276,729	1.94

<i>Professional and Related Services</i>	19,074,245	18.43	27,009,241	52.37	18,215,168	20.38	27,868,318	42.44
<i>Public Administration</i>	4,483,480	4.33	2,630,022	5.10	23,03,242	2.58	4,810,260	7.32
Total	103,487,634	99.64^a	51,56,9623	100%	89,385,657	100	65,671,600	100

^aSum of %'s based on rounded figures.

Table 3 (continued). Employment in Industry Categories by Three Definitions of the Working Class, employed workers in ACS 2017

Industry	Creative Classes				Totals	
	Creative Proletariat	% of CP	Creative Class	% of CC	Total	% of Labor Force
<i>Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries</i>	3,245,912	3.41	274,055	0.46	3,519,967	2.27
<i>Mining</i>	502,363	0.53	223,738	0.37	726,101	0.47
<i>Construction</i>	8,383,696	8.80	1,877,167	3.14	10,260,863	6.62
<i>Manufacturing</i>	10,894,639	11.44	5,126,315	8.57	16,020,954	10.33
<i>Public Utilities</i>	8,407,760	8.83	2,479,129	4.14	10,886,889	7.02
<i>Wholesale Trade</i>	2,724,004	2.86	1,269,553	2.12	3,993,557	2.58
<i>Retail Trade</i>	21,376,484	22.45	6,131,767	10.25	27,508,251	17.74
<i>FIRE</i>	3,363,683	3.53	6,655,731	11.12	10,019,414	6.46
<i>Business and Repair Services</i>	6,168,607	6.48	4,686,730	7.83	10,855,337	7.00
<i>Personal Services</i>	4,498,390	4.72	852,631	1.42	5,351,021	3.45
<i>Entertainment and Recreation Services</i>	1,858,411	1.95	859,504	1.44	2,717,915	1.75
<i>Professional and Related Services</i>	19,390,113	20.36	26,693,373	44.61	46,083,486	29.72
<i>Public Administration</i>	4,401,555	4.62	2,711,947	4.53	7,113,502	4.59
Total	95,215,617	100	59,841,640	100	15,505,7257	100

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Three Definitions of the Working Class, employed workers in ACS 2017

	Metzgar	All nonWC by Metzgar	Cohen	All non-WC by Cohen	Florida	Creative Proletariat	Creative Class	Total Labor Force
<i>N</i>	103,487,634	51,569,623	89,385,657	65,671,600	95,215,617	59,841,640		155,057,257
<i>% of Total Labor Force</i>	66.7	33.3	57.6	42.4	61.4	38.6		100
<i>Wage and Salary Income (mean)</i>	36,169.38	73,973.88	33,130.53	69,992.12	32,871.27	73,995.80		48,742.56
<i>Wage and Salary Income (median)</i>	27,400.00	55,000.00	25,000.00	52,000.00	25,900.00	55,000.00		35,000.00
<i>% at or below 200% poverty level</i>	26.91	8.88	28.09	10.00	27.53	9.14		20.43
<i>% with Bachelor's Degree</i>	17.69	68.68	15.72	60.42	15.77	64.70		34.65
<i>% NH White</i>	58.42	71.46	56.85	70.78	57.50	71.10		62.75
<i>% NH Black</i>	12.77	8.51	13.07	9.03	13.37	8.15		11.36
<i>% NH Other</i>	7.97	10.24	8.19	9.45	7.48	10.70		8.73
<i>% Hispanic</i>	20.85	9.78	21.89	10.75	21.65	10.04		17.17
<i>Mean Age</i>	41.00	43.88	40.53	43.90	40.82	43.76		41.96
<i>% Married</i>	46.92	61.89	45.04	61.23	45.89	61.45		51.90
<i>% male</i>	55.32	46.84	53.77	50.78	54.35	49.56		52.50
<i>% non-citizen</i>	10.2	5.3	11.1	5.1	10.4	5.7		8.6
<i>% rural^a</i>	8.2	5.5	8.1	6.1	8.4	5.5		7.3
<i>% in central city^b</i>	10.5	12.2	10.7	11.6	10.6	11.9		11.1

^a19,123,743, or 12.3% of all cases, geography not identifiable

^b65,950,328, or 42.5% of all cases, central city status unknown

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Broad Definition of the Working Class, employed workers ACS 2017

	WC by Any Definition	Non-WC by Any Definition	Total Labor Force
<i>N</i>	122,773,708	32,283,549	155,057,257
<i>% of total labor force</i>	79.2	20.8	100
<i>Wage and Salary Income (mean)</i>	37,788.60	90,400.28	48,742.56
<i>Wage and Salary Income (median)</i>	29,000.00	69,000.00	35,000.00
<i>% at or below 200% poverty level</i>	25.80	0	20.43
<i>% with Bachelor's Degree</i>	17.47	100.00	34.65
<i>% NH White</i>	59.83	73.84	62.75
<i>% NH Black</i>	12.47	7.10	11.36
<i>% NH Other</i>	7.90	11.86	8.73
<i>% Hispanic</i>	19.79	7.20	17.17
<i>Mean Age</i>	41.35	44.24	41.96
<i>% Married</i>	47.98	66.78	51.90
<i>% male</i>	53.89	47.23	52.50
<i>%non-citizen</i>	9.4	5.3	8.6
<i>% rural^a</i>	8.0	4.5	7.3
<i>% in central city^b</i>	10.5	13.5	11.1

^a12.3% of all cases, geography not identifiable

^b42.5% of all cases, central city status unknown