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Political emotions: A role for feelings of affinity in citizens' (dis)engagements with electoral politics?

Abstract

This article develops the concept of affinity as one means available in understanding how citizens make, or fail to make, connections with politics and politicians. It is argued that the disappearance of class from much political discourse has led to more emotional ways of relating to politics. We claim that the reflexivity involved in political deliberation must take account of people's emotional responses to the political. We argue that one key element in these emotional responses is a feeling, or lack of feeling, of affinity. We propose that citizens often use feelings of likeness in their (dis)engagement with politicians, policies and parties. Understanding the emotional aspects of political (dis)engagement in this way is crucial in dealing with concerns about widespread disengagement from and dissatisfaction with electoral politics.

Keywords: Affinity, agency, emotional reflexivity, politics.

Introduction

Two recent articles in *Sociology* have attempted to 'emotionalize' concepts of reflexivity (Burkitt 2012; Holmes 2010). This paper furthers these calls by arguing for the role of emotions, in particular feelings of affinity and its lack, in people's reflexive deliberations and engagement with electoral politics. Our concern with affinity emerged out of empirical work on the political disengagement and dissatisfaction of members of the white working classes (Holmes and Manning 2013, Manning and Holmes 2013), undertaken in the lead up to the 2010 British General Election. Thus, much of our discussion relates to the British context, although we think the ideas apply to similar established democracies. What follows is a theoretical discussion aiming to provide some clarity on how *citizens* may be using feelings in deliberating about and (dis)engaging from an increasingly mediatized politics, adrift from class or other group identifications.

A range of emotions are routinely invoked in public discussions of politics. Recent examples abound: President Obama's 2008 campaign motif of 'hope'; the outpouring of public indignation surrounding the Westminster expenses scandal¹; the 'joy' and excitement in Egypt as Mubarak was overthrown (Ali 2011); anger at Tony Blair from families of British military personnel killed during the Iraq war (Lewis and Dodd 2010); the shame evoked by President Bush's response to hurricane Katrina (Wing 2010); the catharsis as Australia's Prime Minister formally apologised to Australia's Indigenous peoples. In addition, there is also a body of academic literature which documents widespread electoral disengagement, low levels of trust and high levels of cynicism about politics and politicians (Hay 2007; Fox 2012; Nye et al. 1997; Stoker 2006). Popular connections are made between emotions and politics, and surveys identify the palpable shortcomings of the political system, but

social science, and sociology in particular, seldom consider the role and importance of emotions in thinking about and engaging with electoral politics.

This article sets out why emotions, in particular affinity, may play an increasingly important role in political deliberations and outcomes, overshadowing other factors such as the state of the economy, policy, electoral cohort effects, and leadership. We argue that the decline of class as an organising framework for politics has increased the importance of reflexivity. As people rely less on habitual behaviour or social structure to guide action, emotions become more important in deliberating and negotiating contemporary society (Holmes 2010). We suggest that the emotional turn in politics emerges out of the infectious egalitarianism of mass democracy and manifests itself in an expectation that politicians present themselves as connected to 'ordinary people' and everyday life. Affinity – and its lack – is thus a major way of engaging with the polis in an increasingly complex world. While high levels of dissatisfaction and electoral disengagement have been registered, many people do still engage with politics, if not through voting. This is happening affectively amidst the demise of a grassroots base to party politics and an undermining of the regulatory and identificatory purchase of social institutions like class that previously played central roles in organising people's engagement with politics. We begin by tracing these key socio-political changes, then outline how they have produced the conditions making emotional reflexivity and affinity pivotal in people's relationship with politics.

Setting the scene: democracy, 'ordinary people', and reflexive modernity

Mass representative democracy contains the kernel of possibility for affinity to shape relationships between citizens and the political. The history of the working class struggle for representative democracy is significant as it is firstly, the winning of universal male suffrage and, secondly, the formation of modern Labo(u)r parliamentary parties at the end of the nineteenth century which marks the beginning of organised parliamentary representation of working people by working people.² The extension of the franchise during this period, which took considerably longer for women and indigenous peoples, injected modernity with a modicum of egalitarianism. However imperfect (see for example Williams 1983: 102-127), representative democracy allowed the majority to have some say. The right to stand for office inevitably followed the right to vote, and age old prejudices about working class people's unsuitability to exercise leadership were gradually undermined. While the erosion of aristocratic dominance in politics may have moved at a glacial pace (Guttsman 1967), by 1945 nearly thirty per cent of British Labour MPs had been manual workers before entering parliament (Burch and Moran 1985). These changes mark the shift towards the notion that political leaders might be 'ordinary people'.

The period of 'organised modernity' (Wagner 1994) between the late nineteenth century and the early 1970s involved relative political stability, with voting behaviour firmly aligned with social class position (Butler and Stokes 1969). Mass political parties marshalled modes of political participation. Governments of this time reconfigured society to minimise uncertainty and impose control after a period

of great social, political and technological change. This restructuring was driven by the conventionalisation and homogenisation of practices including the establishment of mass political parties; Taylorist and Fordist modes of production that extended and normalised consumption; and the introduction of social security (and later the welfare state) ensuring material security but opening family life to disciplining and homogenising forms of 'scientific' state surveillance (Rose 1989). This period was characterised by an optimism about the future and society's ability to harness the power of science, technology and rationality to ensure the continuation of the prosperity enjoyed during the final decades of this era (Harvey 1989; Maier 1970; Rabinbach, 1992; Scott 1998).

The period following 'organised modernity' was characterised by increasing uncertainty about the future and the breakdown of the newly established practices. It has variously been described as postmodernity (Lyotard 1984), *Liquid Modernity* (Bauman 2000), late modernity (Giddens 1990) or reflexive modernity (Beck et al 1994). For our purposes it is the increasing importance of reflexivity that is most useful in understanding the rise of affinity as a means of (dis)connecting 'ordinary people' and electoral politics/politicians.

Reflexivity gains importance as processes of industrialization and detraditionalization manufacture a range of unforeseen hazards and side-effects to which societies must respond (Beck 1992). Beck argues that these catastrophes and on-going risks undermine our confidence in the ability to scientifically control nature, society, and the economy, thereby politicising risks. At the same time, the structuring role of traditional institutions becomes obscured and this demands decisions from individuals, or at least that individuals assume responsibility for such decisions. While Beck is clear that individualization does not mean people are increasingly atomised or alone, he argues that the shift to reflexive modernity accompanies the breakdown of social class as a central concept for organising society. Whilst we may disagree with Beck on this, we accept that the institutions and structures of organised (or simple) modernity recede. Accordingly, social class supposedly declines as a means of organising politics.³ Social change weakens the hold of class over politics and vote, opening up space for the mediatization and 'personalization of politics'.

Affinity, we argue, is a feeling that seeps into the gap left by the decline of politics based on identity. In particular, class identity faded as an institutionalized foundation of party politics in conjunction with the development of other identity politics, especially around new social movements from the 1960s. The women's movement, civil rights, black power and gay/lesbian movements were based on notions of identity resting on shared experiences as members of an oppressed group. Feminist standpoint theory presented one scholarly version of this position (for example, Harstock 1998). Closely related intellectual debates weighed the political need to redress class based economic inequalities via redistribution against the need for recognition (of identity-based groups) (see Fraser and Honneth 2003). However, identity politics have been criticised by scholars and became highly problematic in practice as oppressed groups became increasingly aware of

differences within (see Young 1991). There was also criticism of the very notion of stable and discrete identities as the basis for political representation (*inter alia* Butler 1992). In relation to both social movements and electoral politics, scholars of radical democracy (for example Laclau and Mouffe 1985) have long since argued that needs and interests do not emerge from particular identities such as class, but are fluidly constructed in action. We explore how voters might construct their needs and interests in (inter)action, or indeed inaction. Instead of vote and class position being closely aligned, we argue that working class, and perhaps other, voters relate to politics in a context of mediatization and detraditionalization wherein affinity is a useful term for understanding the on-going ways in which citizens experience (dis)connection with politics and politicians.

Thus, we maintain that social class may not organise politics as in the past, but it remains a vital element in how citizens relate and connect to electoral politics and politicians (see also Anderson, Yang and Heath 2006). Precisely how they do so in reflexive modernity remains under researched. To elaborate on this is to recognise people's critical and agentic judgement of politics and politicians, but also that critical (dis)engagement alone is unlikely to alter established power relations.

Since the 1970s, there has been a decline in the organisational role of social structures like class and institutions such as trade unions and religion (although religion's influence in US politics appears counter to this trend). These changes have undermined the previous relative political stability driven by alignment between social class, party identification and voting (Butler and Stokes 1969). At the same time, support for democracy remains strong (Norris 2011) and the notion of political leaders showing some connection or familiarity to everyday life persists. There is no doubt that various factors like policy, leadership, demographics and economics impact on election outcomes. Yet the shifting of structures that previously oriented people to politics, require new ways of relating to and interpreting politics, policies and politicians. We argue that affinity is one factor which may be facilitating such (dis)connections, and drawing emotions into reflexive deliberation about politics.⁴

Understanding the role of affinity in people's reflexive engagements with politics requires a concept of reflexivity attuned to an emotional register. Beck and Giddens have promoted a predominantly cognitive model of reflexivity, situating the project of self within an emerging social need to monitor, calculate, and respond to new risks or to the impact of detraditionalization (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991). Lash and Urry (1994; Beck et al. 1994) have extended this model through their notion of aesthetic reflexivity which involves the interpretation of aesthetic symbols, images and allegory. This moves us towards a more embodied notion of reflexivity, but the role of emotions in these accounts is distinctly lacking.

Set the controls for the heart: emotionalizing reflexivity

As outlined above, the shift to reflexive modernisation unleashes great uncertainty and diminishing confidence in our ability to tame and control the future. Giddens has focused on processes of detraditionalization and explored the ontological

insecurity that emerges under these conditions, where knowledge is constantly revised and there are no firm foundations upon which to base action; in the words of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 'there are no historical models for the conduct of life' (2001: 26). For Giddens (1990), trust therefore becomes central to sociality and people increasingly rely upon abstract systems and experts, while Beck and Beck-Gernsheim have discussed the experimentation of do-it-yourself biographies (2001). These strategies do not account for the need to make decisions in the face of conflicting truth claims or the part that emotions may play in constructing experimental biographies. In contrast, we draw upon a notion of reflexivity that holds emotions as central to the way people relationally interact with the world around them and reproduce the social. Emotional reflexivity is an embodied, cognitive and relational process in which social actors have feelings about and try to understand and alter their lives in relation to their social and natural environment and to others (Holmes 2010). It is about how emotion 'infuses' our perceptions of the world, others and oneself (Burkitt 2012: 458). In the context of this paper, emotional reflexivity means incorporating how you feel into engagements with politics. However, politics is just one sphere in which emotional reflexivity is increasingly necessary (Holmes 2010).

As class identity recedes as an organising principle for electoral politics (see Anderson, Yang and Heath 2006; Heath, Curtice and Elgenius 2009), emotional reflexivity becomes increasingly central to how citizens engage with politics, especially in terms of feelings of affinity (and a lack thereof). Thus, affinity is worth developing as a concept for understanding contemporary political (dis)engagement.

Using affinity to understand emotions and politics

To have an affinity for someone or something is to have a spontaneous liking for them or it, usually based on some feeling of connection and commonality. Although it can be glossed as a liking based on likeness, affinity does not require identification with someone who shares a similar social position and experiences. Feelings of affinity may be easier to foster within a shared identity or social position, but contemporary politicians (let alone political leaders) rarely inhabit the same social position as those they represent. As we discuss in more detail below, the elite educational and professional backgrounds of most politicians mean that connections with everyday life and 'ordinary' people tend to be superficial and must be *performed* rather than based in experience and actual shared social positions, as they may have been in the past. Hence, affinity may be felt if someone seems to enact some knowledge and emotional understanding of one's situation and priorities. Some thought is necessary to establish this conceptualisation as there has been almost no theorisation of affinity.⁵

Literature on political affinity consists only of an occasional paper that captures the sense of affinity as a liking based on likeness, but does not explore the quality of that liking. For example, there is work on measuring affinity as an explanation for whether women voters are more likely to vote for women politicians (Dolan 2008).

Potentially useful work on emotions in politics deals mostly with social movements (for example, Holmes 2004; Flam and King 2005; King 2006; Goodwin et al. 2001), with rare attention to emotions in electoral politics (see a few of the chapters in Hoggett and Thomson 2012; Ost 2004). However there are useful debates about a 'personalization of politics' (see Swanson and Mancini 1996). In Adorno and his colleagues' classic study of *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950), evaluations of politicians are adjudged to be focused on persons rather than ideas. These evaluations rest largely on a praise of honesty that tends to show 'hatred against comfortable living, against the "snobbish upper class" who supposedly enjoy things one has to deny oneself' (Adorno et al. 1950: 670). Similarly, Bauman's discussion of individualization (2001) is allied to his view that the public is increasingly colonised by the private (1999). The private lives of politicians are also politicized, (see for example Langer 2010), and there is an increasing 'presidentialization' of democratic politics across different countries and different political systems (Poguntke and Webb 2005). Party politics retains some relevance, but political leaders exercise increasing power/autonomy within executive and party contexts and elections and campaign activity focus more and more on leaders, making them like celebrities (Street 2004, 2012; West and Orman 2003) and highlighting the central role of the media in politics.

The mass media have become the dominant source of information on politics and the separation between politics and the media is increasingly blurred (Strömbäck 2008). Also, much of the media is more interested in entertaining than analysing (Van Zoonen 2005). The mediatized sphere of politics can also be understood, using Bourdieu, as a field in which forms of capital are sought and acquired (Bourdieu 1998, 2005; Davis 2010). Davis's notion of 'media capital' underscores the mediatization of politics by showing that ambitious politicians now principally require technical skills of 'policy construction and news management'. Crucial social capital comes not from colleagues but the party hierarchy and political journalists; and symbolic capital is generated via a more rehearsed and systematic approach which focuses on the mass media (Davis 2010: 219). However, the Bourdiesian focus on habitus as a source of capital is insufficient for understanding the reflexivity necessary in adapting to rapid change and unfamiliar situations (Holmes 2010) and these accounts of mediatization do not attend to citizens.

Public engagement with politics is almost always mediated, and citizens do place importance on the ability of politicians to communicate well (Manning and Holmes 2013), but such debates focus on the kinds of information people receive about politics and politicians, rather than to what they make of that information. Similarly, work on the 'personalization of politics' typically focuses on professional political actors rather than how citizens engage with and interpret political information. In addition, the emotional dimensions of these shifts in the conduct of politics are usually overlooked. Our aim is to develop the idea of affinity so that it can help in understanding how citizens, based on the mediated information available, evaluate politics and politicians. Here we take a very modest step in beginning that work.

There is need for an historical and theoretical framework for exploring affinity in political life, in order to challenge assumptions that disengaged citizens are necessarily individualized and apathetic (Manning 2012). Affinity may not be simply about liking an individual politician, but could extend to liking types of people, policies or sets of values. Affinity may act as an interpretive lens through which leaders, politicians and policies are read. Although individualization, mediatization and personalization processes supposedly put increasing emphasis on individual politicians, citizens may actually evaluate politicians in terms of how well they seem to relate to people.

The concept of affinity can assist in analysing the distinctly modern feeling of democratic citizens that they should have leaders, often their social 'betters', whose lives are not utterly removed from their own. This contrasts sharply with former sovereign power predicated on difference, otherness and hierarchy (Elias 2000; Foucault 1980). As suggested above, political affinity requires mass democracy, mass media and a social structure with a modicum of mobility. With increasing numbers of people from working class occupations entering politics (Burch and Moran 1985; James and Markey 2006) expectations emerged that political representatives might, and indeed 'should', share the life experiences of those they represent. Modern political representatives must manage the tension created by democracy's egalitarianism in calling for them to present both 'eminence' and affinity in their engagement with citizens (Daloz 2009). Expectations for connection may be disappointed as most political leaders continue to be drawn from class elites, but some fellow feeling for the 'ordinary person' is still often demanded of politicians (Manning and Holmes 2013). This indicates that it is important not simply to understand different political leadership styles (Little 1985; Weber 1948), but to explore the part that emotions play in reasoning about politics and politicians.

We need to re-examine the relationship between emotions, agency and rationality in order to better understand political disengagement. In analysing the appeal of Fascist politics, Adorno et al. (1950) asked 'why is it that certain individuals accept these ideas while others do not?' (Adorno et al. 1950: 3). This is a useful question, but this extremely interesting book is profoundly limited in its treatment of emotions. Fascism is thought to appeal 'not to rational self-interest, but to emotional needs – often to the most primitive and irrational wishes and fears' (Adorno et al. 1950: 10). This assumption that Fascism is 'irrational' has been powerfully countered by Bauman (1989) in his account of the brutal bureaucratic efficiency of the final solution. Emotions are seen by Adorno as the antithesis of reasoning and rationality. This is redolent of the now much criticised classic split between emotion and reason, which devalues emotion (Lloyd 1984). Frankfurt school work like Adorno's reinforces the reason/emotion split partly through adherence to Freudian psychoanalysis, producing assumptions that people are ignorant and confused, barely repressing their irrationality under mass-produced conventional opinions. This renders individuals as lacking in any real agency, and assumes that reasoning and deliberation is unemotional, or that 'emotional needs' are primitive barriers to enlightened, rational political decision making (Marcus 2002).

By contrast, understanding affinity as a crucial part of emotional reflexivity can enable us to explore how more tolerant and egalitarian forms of political engagement can be supported. We contend that political deliberations involve forms of reasoning, and especially an emotional reflexivity that can draw on feelings, without being 'irrational'. The interpreting of one's own and others' emotions that is involved in emotional reflexivity is work at which some social groups might learn to be more proficient than others. Women's supposed superiority in dealing with emotions has not however, seemed to promote their social equality, often the reverse (Hochschild 2003; Lloyd 1984). Similarly, the working classes are often thought to rely more on their emotions (and practical abilities) than on abstract reasoning (Bourdieu 1987). In other words, marginalised groups have often been devalued partly on the grounds of their supposed over-emotional and insufficiently rational subjectivities. Resorting to feelings to guide thought and actions may in fact be endemic within reflexive modernity, where knowledge is highly specialized and unfamiliar situations often arise in which there is no relying on routine or habitual action. Everyone may be obliged to depend more on their emotions in their deliberations, but it is worth considering whether differing class positions might affect how this happens. Affinity may be an important feeling and feelings, unlike the bodily, conscious and discursive aspect of emotions, may reside more on the threshold of consciousness and thus be harder to articulate (Burkitt 2010). This does not make affinity irrational or asocial.

Affinity: Citizen and polity (dis)connections

Affinity describes a feeling of relation to others without necessarily relying on having a shared social position. Rosi Braidotti (2006) argues that affinity is crucial in the process of becoming other that is at the heart of creating more ethical forms of subjectivity. We argue that affinity more typically begins from an uncritical sense of familiarity or sameness, perhaps not dissimilar to the easier 'identification' with leaders more like themselves, briefly mentioned in *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950: 670). It is felt as a liking for 'someone like me', who seemingly shares an understanding of the places and experiences important to me. A lack of affinity may produce unease or anger or disgust, or just annoyance at the people and structures that complicate, or fail to understand the importance of local conditions and ways of life (Manning and Holmes 2013).

How citizens learn about and relate to politics is distorted by our mediated relationship with politics, which overemphasises media commentary on politics/politicians and the embodied media performances of politicians. There is an expectation that politicians experientially and somatically reflect the electorate back to themselves; although unlike some accounts of descriptive representation (e.g. see Pitkin 1967) this frequently does not extend to representing gender, sexual or ethnic and cultural diversity. This occurs through a range of means and may include evoking their experience as a parent or spouse, through a regional accent or using the vernacular or bodily comportment. During the 2010 election campaign in Britain,

the Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg's newness, plain speaking and increased media coverage (particularly through televised 'Leader Debates') helped garner him support (Drake and Higgins 2012; Parry and Richardson 2011). These performances are about exhibiting one's credibility, experience and skill for the job with a convincing authenticity; the subtext is 'I understand you because I am like you. I know your troubles, I know the problems in *our* area and I can make things better.' However, as noted above, we know that dissatisfaction and disengagement from politics runs deep. Affinity between citizens, polity and politicians is likely rare, with people frequently feeling disconnected and a lack of affinity between their lives and concerns and those of political elites and agendas.

Clearly, data on how *citizens* use notions of affinity in their (dis)engagements with politics is lacking. Yet there are numerous examples of the ways in which politicians perform connections to everyday life. They attend popular sporting events or profess interest in popular culture; domestic imagery and context is used to 'humanize' them as parents and spouses (Langer 2010, 2012). In Australia, male politicians (including Prime Ministers and Opposition Leaders) routinely sit in the front seat of chauffeured vehicles to avoid charges of snobbery (FitzSimons 2012). US Presidents choose inexpensive wrist watches while in office⁶; or British Tories are reportedly instructed not to drink champagne at the 2010 party conference when about to introduce severe public spending cuts (Hope 2010).

The affinity creating strategies of politicians should be addressed by future research, but we are particularly interested in how *citizens* use affinity as part of their reflexive (dis)engagement with and deliberation about politics. The Westminster expenses scandal is perhaps the most recent important event to highlight the profound lack of affinity many citizens feel for politicians and politics. There were serious public issues of accountability and transparency at stake, but for many this misappropriation of public money for private benefit prompted feelings of anger, disgust and moral outrage at the socio-economic inequality it revealed between citizens and many political elites and the double standards and disregard it showed for members of the public trying to live decent lives (Manning and Holmes 2013).

It is important to note that affinity not only operates at the level of individual reflexive deliberation and (dis)engagement with politics, but is a decidedly social activity. Feelings of affinity – more often their lack – are always relationally worked out. They are produced socially, featuring regularly in offhand and more considered talk about politics and evaluations of politicians (Manning and Holmes 2013).

Our point is that emotions, reflexivity and affinity have become more important in people's engagement with politics. They were no doubt deployed as strategies for politicians/parties or enveloped in citizens' engagement with the polity in the past, but less so. Although we might dispute the extent of class breakdown (see Reay 2005, Skeggs 2004), changes in class formation have cracked open party and voter alignment requiring parties make broad-based appeals to the electorate (Kirchheimer 1966); electoral volatility has increased and partisanship has declined (Webb et al 2002). While elections continue to have particular dimensions, voters

now have comparatively more agency than when class and vote were closely aligned.

While historically politicians have often claimed humble origins and tried to connect with 'ordinary people',⁷ this new mediatized and more reflexive relationship between politicians, polity and citizens has also been noted by others (Bauman 1999; Brett and Moran 2006). It transcends the particular affective strategies of politicians to include the emotional interpretation of all aspects of politics – politicians, policy, parties. Hence, this emotional turn is not only a strategy available to political elites but also a way for citizens to interpret, relate to, engage with, and choose to disengage from politics.

Affinity and emotional reflexivity are part of the interpretive framework people use to engage with and negotiate the political, but they do not translate to particular forms of political practice; affinity is equally available to voters and non-voters. Given the context of electoral disengagement and dissatisfaction in many countries (Dalton 2004), it seems likely that wholehearted affinity is rarely found and its lack may indeed help explain dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction/disengagement may indeed arise from the dynamics of reflexive affinity politics itself – wherein disengagement results from the professionalization and perceived falseness and inauthenticity of contemporary politics (Holmes and Manning 2013). Understanding political engagement in this way helps reveal the critical work required by a cynical political stance (Bhavnani 1991; Manning and Holmes 2013). Moreover, the high levels of political disengagement and dissatisfaction with politics highlight the lack of consent and confidence in political rulers. Democracy may be highly valued (Norris 2011), but acceptance of political rulers is far from hegemonic.

The working classes were central to the fight for democracy which eroded the power of the old regime, breathing an egalitarian ethos into modernity. Labo(u)r parties provided working people with access to government, but it is only the weakening of a politics structured by class and party identification which allows for emotions to play a decisive role in people's deliberation and interpretation of the political. And it should be noted that the demand for politicians connected to everyday life and 'ordinary people' has emerged amidst the decline and increasing disconnection of political parties from the political engagement of citizens (Webb et al 2002). The *performance* of connection to everyday life and local conditions has come to replace a party system with solid membership, local branches and links to local communities.⁸

The new conceit is that politicians – let alone political leaders – are rarely 'ordinary people'. They are presenting themselves as regular folk but are part of a ruling elite, drawn from an increasingly narrow and privileged educational and professional background (Norris 2011; House of Commons Library 2010; Sutton Trust 2010). To satisfy democracy's egalitarianism, most politicians can only perform connections to everyday life and 'ordinary' people and appeals to shared identity or social position tend to be superficial (locality, father/mother, fellow tax payer). Such performances are rarely convincing (Manning and Holmes 2013). On occasion the conceit is

revealed, as with the Westminster expenses scandal, and feelings of affinity are undercut by disgust and indignation. More commonly these performances are dismissed as phony or duplicitous.

Yet affinity implies more than the notion of demographic representation (McLean 1991). Affinity is not about thinking that women are better placed to understand and articulate the concerns of women or members of the working classes are better able to reflect and express the problems faced by workers. The very need for performances of affinity underscores the disjuncture between citizens and political elites. Affinity is a liking based on likeness but does not require demographic sameness to operate. Instead, ruling elites are expected to reflect local conditions and everyday life back to the public and gesture at understanding and familiarity with their lives and a shared set of concerns/values.

Of course, politicians use other strategies to win support from citizens and at times may resist the logic of affinity.⁹ When Julia Gillard became Australia's first female Prime Minister there was concern that as an unmarried childless woman she would not understand the needs of Australian families. Her response was to say "we're never going to have a Prime Minister that captures everybody's life experience" (Gillard 2010). She acknowledged the limits of individual experience as a way of knowing and understanding the needs of voters and emphasised her skills and ability to meet the public's needs.

Strategies other than affinity for linking parties/politicians and individuals remain. Common to the left and extreme right are appeals to imagined communities (Anderson 1991), capable of facing the insecurities of the times and reasserting certainty. Closer to the centre and centre-right of politics is the practice of party clientelism. This is where elected representatives assume the role once undertaken by local notables or land-owners and exchange votes and support for state resources (see Roniger 2004).

While affinity draws our attention to the ways in which emotions may be used in people's deliberations about politics, it is symptomatic of a politics which holds little scope for a collective approach. Contemporary politics typically treats citizens as individuals or members of families, rather than as members of a group political force. Strategies of connection drawing on affinity are conducive to this reflexive politics which prioritises tacit knowledge, everyday life and links to particularised local contexts. While affinity may appear inevitably aligned with an individualised politics, emotions in politics and emotional deliberation about politics need not be an individualising force. In contrast, it can operate as a demand for recognition, for a politics relevant and connected to the concerns of citizens. The possibility of using feelings of affinity to demand that politics and politicians are oriented toward achieving greater social equality are well worth exploring in further research.

Concluding Remarks

A role for affinity in understanding political deliberation and (dis)engagement emerges out of the shift to mass democracy and the mobilisation and election to office of working class people. These momentous changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were a profound challenge to established power relations and notions of fitness to rule. The old regime was cracked open, revealing the potential for political leaders to be drawn from 'ordinary people' with direct experience of everyday life. By the mid-twentieth century, social class was strongly aligned to voting behaviour. However, the subsequent demise of class-based politics and the emergence of reflexive modernity have stripped away the broad collectivist identities of mass democracy. The breakdown of class-based politics is part of the broader disruption and fracturing of 'organised modernity'; although it is unlikely this fracturing has produced disembedded individuals with greater agency and autonomy (Dawson 2012). Shifting class, gender and ethnic relations disrupt traditional ways of being and doing. Reflexivity thus becomes a key resource in a social world where individuals can rely on routine or habitual action less and less. The rise of reflexivity has fundamental affective dimensions; as exemplified this includes affinity as a driver in people's interpretation of and (dis)engagement from politics.

Affinity is a concept that draws attention to democratic equality and calls for politicians to share things – or at least perform a connection – with 'ordinary' people and everyday life. These may include: a location, a way of speaking, comportment, attitude, particular values or experiences. Instead of social class and party identification organising our relationship with politics, affinity highlights emotional connections. A focus on affinity emphasises the experiential component of a politician's competencies, in contrast to older notions of sovereign authority or the idea that politicians are primarily managers, needing a range of skills and knowledge to make them competent representatives. Some of these factors retain currency, but the expectation of ordinariness/humility and a connection to everyday life is added. Leaders must have emotional appeal.

Political affinity can be seen as a lens through which citizens interpret politics and politicians. It may work to form points of connection or departure between citizens and their political leaders, but it operates in a context where collective political identities have been seriously undermined. Social class has largely been expunged from the public and party political lexicon and in its absence citizens are frequently carved up into small electoral niches, despite any continued crosscutting salience of socio-economic deprivation to their lives. Politicians' attempts to foster affinity typically appeal to individuals, families, regional/local identities or that most empty of social groups, taxpayers. Running in parallel to the decline of collectivist political forms, the grass-roots basis of mass political parties has also all but disappeared. While affinity may be an important means of (dis)engagement in a mediatized, reflexive politics, it is a poor substitute for a party system with a vibrant grassroots base, genuine participation and links to local communities. And while our approach highlights the agentic and critical work of citizens – even when they chose to disengage from politics – as a resource for citizens' affinity it is unlikely to alter established power relations.

This paper builds on recent calls for notions of reflexivity to include emotions and draws attention to the ways people continue to make demands of their leaders via an affective interpretive frame. Citizens are not completely atomised, politics is not purely instrumental and our emotional engagement with politics and politicians is much more complex than ‘hate’ (Hay 2007).

A focus on affinity can help challenge the common assumption that disengaged citizens are necessarily individualized and apathetic by highlighting the critical work of citizens and the failures of political elites to meaningfully connect. Furthermore, the affinity frame unsettles divisions between emotion and rationality and offers a fruitful line of inquiry in how feelings and emotions are part of reflexivity and agency. Further empirical work is required to qualitatively flesh out the role of emotions in people’s deliberations about politics and the extent to which affinity may be operating. Sociology has a key role to play here with its broad range of methodological and theoretical tools. A wide range of emotions are part of politics and sustained scholarly investigation of the role of emotions in people’s (dis)engagements with electoral politics is long overdue.

1 This scandal had been brewing but erupted when in May 2009 *The Telegraph Newspaper* published leaked information detailing MP’s abuses of expenses claims.

2 It is important to note however, the fraught relationship between trade unionists and women and the exclusionary masculine culture of some local associations (for example see, Markey 1980).

3 Nonetheless, we would not want to argue that contemporary politics is only defined by the politicisation of risks, post-materialist agendas or the abandonment of emancipatory politics. Cohort and generational dynamics have a role to play here, but so too does socio-economic conditions. Much of Europe is currently engaged in bitter battles to retain social services and some semblance of state welfare provision. The Occupy Movement also provided a dramatic example of how materialist agendas retain relevance in contemporary politics. Indeed, our previous work on political dissatisfaction and disengagement amongst members of the white working classes highlights the on-going salience of socio-economic inequality and social immobility. This work argued that part of the explanation for dissatisfaction/disengagement was a sense among participants that politicians were distanced from their local concerns and from the economic disadvantage that constrains their lives (Manning and Holmes 2013).

4 Affective strategies are available to both citizens and politicians and the question of whose affinity politicians and parties garner will be important for future empirical work (e.g. are specific groups, like young people or ethnic minorities, ignored at both a policy and affective level?)

5 There has been a little empirical work on the idea of ‘generational affinities’ with types of computer technology (McMullin et al. 2007). Max Weber used the notion of elective affinities, but this referred to the way ideas, mindsets or worldviews were more compatible with some material conditions than others (for a detailed discussion see Howe 1978).

6 Clinton famously wore an inexpensive American watch in office, but has since developed a reputation for collecting luxury watches (Buchanan 2008).

7 One is reminded of Abraham Lincoln and the log cabin of his birth.

8 Here we can note some of the emotions associated with older forms of political engagement; on the left for example, notions of brotherhood and feelings of solidarity amidst class struggle.

⁹ Parry and Richardson's (2011) work on the media's attempts to ascribe characteristics to and construct a persona for Nick Clegg, shows that while the media are key drivers of the personalisation of politics, journalists and the media occasionally reject political engagement and deliberation based on affinity and emotions.

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