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# Subjective Poverty as perceived lasting social insecurity: Lessons from a French survey on poverty, inequality and the welfare state (2015-2018)

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## Abstract

Literature has long been attentive to the study of subjective happiness or well-being. Key questions developed in the late 1970's have recently been framed as indicators of subjective economic stress or used to build "consensual poverty lines". Yet, these notions differ from an authentic – i.e. direct – measure of subjective poverty. We use 2015-2018 French data to determine the share of the population who considers itself as poor and study its social composition. Our results demonstrate that class, family composition and income instability matter as determinants of subjective poverty. The key feature of the group of those who consider themselves as poor is a degraded attitude towards their own future. Finally, we propose a sociological understanding of our subjective poverty indicator.

**Keywords:** Poverty; Subjective Poverty; Class; Family; Gender; Precarity; Inequality; Social Assistance; Capability; Financial stress; Income instability; Bourdieu.

## Introduction

Measuring poverty is a controversial exercise. At the heart of the debates between Townsend (1979) Piachaud (1981), Mack and Lansley (1985) and Sen (1983; 1985) was a discussion on “Who can possibly know better than ordinary people themselves what their perceptions of social necessities are?” (Veit-Wilson, 1987: 189). This question and its policy and normative implications have also been key to the work of the Leyden school (Van Praag, 1968). Subjective monetary poverty literature has therefore adopted two kinds of indicators. On the one hand, the Leyden school has developed measures of subjective poverty since the 1970’s that address the perception of one’s wellbeing among the population. Referred to as an “income proxy method” (Veit-Wilson, 1984: 192), this literature has been operationalized recently in an indicator of subjective economic stress (Hagenaars & de Vos, 1988). On the other hand, consensual poverty lines assess the amount of monetary resources subjectively needed to guarantee to the household minimum living standards. Thus, it implicitly defines a subjective poverty threshold (for a discussion see Van Praag & Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2008).

In our point of view, both of these research strategies have more precisely in common to use subjective methods or variables to determine objective poverty thresholds. What is usually called “subjective poverty” does not refer to a direct measure of identification as poor, and the groups these traditional approaches delimit do not overlap with the one that would result from a direct identification of subjective poverty. The French Opinion Barometer, a sample representative of the whole population (waves 2015-2018, n=12107), allows to determine the share of the population that identifies itself as poor, to evaluate the divergence between each kind of indicator and elaborate a causal analysis of the determinants of the feeling of being poor in France during the most recent years (2015-2018).

Thanks to our direct measure of the share of the population who identifies as poor, we can draw all the consequences of a subjective definition of poverty. Poverty cannot be reduced to a lack of income or even deprivation. It refers to processes of recognition and perception of one’s social status. Thus, as Lamont and Pierson (2019 : 13) argue, through the direct subjective measure of poverty, we are able to “incorporate the impact of stigmatization and recognition into our understanding of the dynamics of inequality”. Our indicator allows us to use a statistical analysis to decompose meaning-making processes. Social actors themselves are those who synthesize the relevant dimensions to define poverty and we measure the results and determinants of this process. Thus, we are able to study the relationship between past and present and demonstrate how current instability is related to degraded future perspectives. To encapsulate both dimensions, we elaborate the concept of lasting social insecurity. This attention to self-identification leads to take the dynamic vision of inequality seriously: subjective poverty can be interpreted as an indicator of lasting social insecurity (Western et al., 2012), since it relates the present and the future of the individual.

This finding leads us to put our measure of subjective poverty in relation with various literatures on poverty and inequality and to address the critical dimension of attitude toward time (Bourdieu, 1977; Darmon, 2018) in the analysis of this phenomenon. A discussion of the theoretical implications of our indicator will address its ability to articulate the findings of

various literatures, as well as to provide a sociological ground to meet with the objectives of a poverty indicator as framed by Sen in normative terms: to capture “a broad perspective of the many kinds of constraints that can limit people’s lives” (Hick, 2012: 12).

## I. Literature: A Critique of Mainstream Subjective Poverty Indicators

Pushed forward by economist Victor Fuchs as early as 1967, relative income poverty is the most widely used definition of poverty in Europe, adopted by Eurostat in 2005. Yet, another strand of literature emphasizes that poverty lines are subjective judgements people make on their own welfare or on a socially minimum acceptable standard of living in their society. It helps understand the limits of the notion of relative monetary poverty and the importance of measuring subjective economic stress. This subjective analytical orientation has two separated roots in recent social thought, of which Sen (1983) and Ravallion (2016) can be regarded as typical examples. In this literature section, we go back to the twofold origin of subjective measures of poverty and the two definitions they lead to adopt (I.1). We next highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the main strands of literature on this notion (I.2). Then, we turn to the presentation of our data, methods and hypotheses.

### I.1. From Relative Monetary Poverty to Subjective Socio-Economic Stress

For greater analytical clarity, we distinguish two strands of literature. The first one is rooted in a critique of Peter Townsend’s seminal work on poverty (1979). The second one is derived from an economic literature that aimed at measuring well-being or happiness (Senik, 2003). Both of these literatures provide insights on the interests and pitfalls of poverty lines to describe and analyze populations at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

#### *I.1.1. A problem of expertise: from Townsend to the Consensual Poverty Line*

Poverty debates that arose in England in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s in the aftermath of the publication of Townsend’s work have raised the epistemic as well as political issue. Veit-Wilson (1987: 187) tracks the confusion in the debates between Sen and Townsend for instance in the fact there is no agreement on the meaning of the words used to define poverty. Beyond this disagreement is a root and unseen cause: “What distinguishes different approaches is the question of *who* decides what necessities are? (we underline)”. The core of the response of those who adopted a consensual approach of poverty consists in asking in return: “Who can possibly know better than ordinary people themselves what their perceptions of social necessities are?” Relative monetary poverty is an explicitly expert construction and assumed as such. In opposition to it, Mack and Lansley developed what has been called a “consensual” approach which aims to identify a minimum acceptable way of life according to *the views of society as whole* (1985, p.42, emphasis in original), rather than by reference to the views of experts or to patterns of expenditure and observed living standards. A significant step forward had therefore been taken in the relativist approach of

poverty, yet subjective poverty did not always refer to a self-identification as poor by the subpopulation concerned. This debate on the competing role of experts and on society's members in evaluating is an important one. In the discussion, we propose to bridge both sides of this debate thanks to the sociological interpretation of our variable.

### *1.1.2. From the Income Evaluation Question (IEQ) to the measure of the subjective economic stress*

In the 1970's, a team of economists and statisticians from the University of Leyden developed a new strand of poverty measure, based on the assumption that "the individuals themselves are the best judge of their own situation" (Van Praag et al., 1980). The principle is clear: "to try to discover if a consensus can be achieved within a country on the level of net cash income required level to make ends meet." (Veit-Wilson, 1987: 190). From a methodological standpoint, these measures take the form of self-rating scales (Ravaillon, 2016: 109). They rely on the general recommendations proposed by Hadley Cantrill's (1965), assuming that semantic differentials can be converted into quantifiable and numerical scores. Survey questions asked respondents what income level they believed to correspond to given levels of well-being (Van Praag, 1968), leading to a Social Subjective Poverty Line. An example is the *Minimum Income Question* (MIQ). "What income level do you personally consider to be absolutely minimal? That is to say that with less you could not make ends meet." Several operationalization of this approach (box 1) has been tested in various contexts (Hagenaars, 1987).

#### **Box 1 - Three subjective poverty lines assessed with the use of statistical methods**

##### *Leyden Poverty Line (LPL):*

This method is based on the Welfare Function of Income (WFI)  $U(y)$ , derived from the Income Evaluation Question (IEQ)

"Please try to indicate what you consider to be an appropriate amount for your household of the following cases. Under my/our conditions I would call an after-tax household income per week/month/year of :

- about ... very bad
- about ... bad
- about ... insufficient
- about ... sufficient
- about ... good
- about ... very good
- Please enter an answer on each line and underline the period you refer to."

##### *Subjective Poverty Line (SPL):*

According to this method, families are poor if their income is not enough to "make ends meet". The MINQ is at the basis of this measure:

“What do you consider as an absolute minimum net income for a household such as yours? In other words, we would like to know an income amount below which you won’t be able to make both ends meet.

- about ... per week / per month / per year.
- Please underline the period you refer to.”

*The Center for Social Policy Poverty Line (CSP):*

The MINQ, standard information and a multi-level attitude question are used to draw this line. The “Deleeck question” reads as follows

“Can you make ends meet with the actual net income?

- with great difficulty,
- with difficulty,
- with some difficulty,
- rather easily,
- easily,
- very easily?”

Source : Flik, van Praag, 1991

### *1.2.1. The MINQ and the making of a subjective poverty line*

The MINQ way of determining a subjective poverty line consists in finding the perceived minimum necessary income<sup>1</sup>. Confronting these subjectively defined lines with relative income poverty thresholds is one of the most current operations realized. De Vos and Garner (1991), for instance, found a smaller income elasticity of subjective poverty line (SPL) in the US than in the Netherlands. They observe that SPL is usually higher than official poverty lines. This kind of approach was also applied with different data, in the Dutch context (Hagenaars and de Vos, 1998), in Australia (Saunders and Matheson 1992), in Sweden (Halleröd 1995), or in international comparisons (Paugam and Selz 2005).

In the UK, the Survey of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain (SPSEB) has allowed a closer approach to a direct measure of poverty. Bradshaw and Finch (2003) have combined different measures to poverty to show the extent to which these latter were overlapping or not - deprivation, subjective poverty and income poverty. They define the subjectively poor as those who say that they are a little or a lot below a level of income “necessary to keep a household such as the one they live in out of poverty”. The word poverty is mentioned explicitly in the survey, which makes the answers closer to a direct measure of subjective poverty. Yet, it still refers to a subjectively defined standard of living and thus can be considered as a subjective poverty line approach.

As Paul Spicker et al. (2007: 199) point out about this approach, members of society are those who define what a decent standard of living is, but it is somewhat misleading to describe their measurements as subjective, since being asked to define a minimum income level is more likely to move people to make a statement about a *social norm* than to reason from

<sup>1</sup> As an example, the MINQ in EU-SILC is “In your opinion, what is the very lowest net monthly income that your household would have to have in order to make ends meet, that is to pay its usual necessary expenses?”

their own standpoint. Moreover, determining whether individuals are poor or not by comparing their effective living standard with what they consider the minimum decent standard amounts to positing that poverty derives essentially from (present) income level. Subjective poverty apprehended as perceived financial difficulty therefore does not represent a fundamentally different notion of what it means to be poor from income poverty.

### *1.2.2. The “Making ends meet” question and the development of an indicator of subjective economic stress*

The “Making end meet” question<sup>2</sup> can be used to operationalize economic stress, (Whelan and Maître, 2009), as “a feeling that you do not have enough to get along” (Goedemé and Rottiders, 2011 : 80). This indicator of subjective poverty has a strong correlation with the income poverty rate across the EU countries measured at 60% of the EU-wide median net income, from a strict country-level viewpoint (Fahey, 2007). Mau et al. (2012) have shown the importance of both contextual and individual factors and studied the effect of institutions on subjective economic stress. Buttler (2013) focused on the link between relative income poverty measures and subjective economic stress within the EU.

This strand has multiple advantages. Firstly, it focuses on “economic vulnerability” (Whelan and Maître, 2010: 318), which avoids a too narrow focus on social exclusion as a range of current deprivations and allows to consider inequality in a dynamic way (Western et al. 2012). Defining vulnerability as insecurity and exposure to risk leads to study the factors of vulnerability for certain groups or individuals, instead of studying the impact of unemployment on social cohesion (Gallie and Paugam, 2000) or deep exclusion as a combination of multiple deprivations (Levitas et al. 2007). Secondly, this approach allows to test the extent to which (and for which groups) welfare states are able to decrease vulnerability (Baldini, Peraldine, Livestri, 2017). However, the equivalence between subjective economic stress and self-identification as poor or poverty feeling remains an assumption. In spite of the seeming closeness of these notions, the overlapping between the populations concerned has to be empirically tested.

A more direct way of apprehending individuals’ perceptions of their own situation relative to poverty might be to focus on people who locate themselves at the lower levels of the social hierarchy. Social position scales have been integrated into several international surveys<sup>3</sup> and may be used to study feelings of marked social inferiority.

Multivariate analysis led by Höfacker, Neumann-Schmidt and Braun (2018) show differences in the determinants and groups patterns between such subjective poverty and standard income poverty. The drawback to this approach is the guiding assumption that self-positioning at lower levels of the social ladder is a similar operation to self-identifying as “poor”.

As compared with these literature strands, having a question that bears specifically on feeling poor is therefore a major asset, for three reasons. First, contrary to other strategies, a poverty

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2 For instance, EU-SILC includes the following question: “Thinking of your household’s total income, is your household able to make ends meet, namely, to pay for its usual necessary expenses?” It is usually considered that households responding “with great difficulty” and “with difficulty” can be denoted as subjectively poor.

line can be drawn without any expert intervention. Second, it is a direct indicator of subjective poverty rather than an indicator that can be used to draw a subjective poverty line. No implicit *ex ante* assumption is required to go from the indicator to the line. Last, unlike most of multidimensional approaches<sup>4</sup>, our indicator avoids the risk resulting from the weighting of the various dimensions at stake or from the omission of relevant dimensions. Social actors themselves are those who synthesize the relevant dimensions to define poverty and this operation can even become a specific research object.

## II. Data, Hypotheses & Methods

### II.1. The data

The DREES Opinion barometer has been following trends in perceptions of social inequalities and of France's social protection system since 2000. In 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018, over 3,000 people were questioned face to face from October to December, resulting in a combined sample of 12,107 persons, 1,668 of whom self-reported as poor (Appendix 1). The annual samples are representative of the population aged 18 or over living in metropolitan France. They were constructed using the quota method by sex, age, and occupation of household reference person, after stratification by region and urban area size.

The survey's main contribution is to make it possible to identify people who consider themselves poor (Box 2). The data can also be used to construct a monetary poverty index (threshold of 60% of median living standard). As is generally the case when comparing self-report and administrative sources, the incomes found by the Barometer vary from those provided by fiscal administration sources; and as predicted, the poverty threshold determined using Barometer data is lower than the INSEE threshold and the monetary poverty rate is slightly higher<sup>5</sup>.

Since 2014, Eurostat has adopted the European Socio-economic Groups (ESeG) classification as a reference tool for the analysis by socio-occupational category at European scale (Méron & al., 2014). Its most aggregated version distinguishes 7 groups: Managers,

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<sup>4</sup> "Recognizing that welfare is "multi-dimensional," and that income is an incomplete metric, does not mean we can credibly collapse the multiple dimensions into a single, unidimensional, space. The essential problem is that we do not know the prices for valuation. (Indeed, if we knew them we would presumably have already formed a measure of full income.) Prevailing practice is essentially to make *ad hoc* assumptions about the welfare function (and hence the weights)." Martin Ravallion, "Poor, or Just Feeling Poor? On Using Subjective Data in Measuring Poverty", *Policy Research working paper* ; no. WPS 5968. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> For more details on this question, see the appendix of Duvoux and Papuchon (2018). Beyond the addition of the 2018 wave, the data used here also differs from the data analyzed in this anterior article in that the survey team have implemented an imputation process allowing to assign a living standard for all respondents. The income is imputed for 22% of the respondent, including 16% who answered to an income bracket question and 6% who did not answer to the income bracket question neither. The variations in income poverty rate between (Duvoux and Papuchon, 2018) and the present paper are negligible.

Professionals, Technicians and Associate Professionals, Clerical Support Workers, Services and Sales Workers, Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Workers, Craft and Related Trades Workers. A more detailed two-digits version determines 30 different positions within the social division of labor.

The classification system used in the Opinion Barometer survey rests on the standard French occupational nomenclature, and cannot be directly related to the most aggregated version of the ESeG. However, a quite straight correspondence table can be established to link the survey's nomenclature with the two-digits version of this international classification (Appendix 2). This study six occupational positions among active respondents, focusing the analysis on the four last categories (for sample size reasons): small agricultural entrepreneurs, other small entrepreneurs, managers and professionals, technicians and associated professional employees, clerks and service workers, industrial and agricultural workers.

#### **BOX 2. — Feeling poor and social insecurity in the DREES Opinion barometer survey**

In the module on poverty and exclusion, respondents were asked the following question, first used in the 2014 questionnaire:

“Do you think there is a risk that you, personally, could become poor in the next five years?”

1. Yes, a fairly high one
2. No, probably not
- [3. I'm already poor]

In the 2014 wave, response option 3 was conceived of as a “hidden” option; it was not directly submitted to respondents and could only be recorded if it was their spontaneous reaction to the question. Starting in 2015, that option was systematically offered, resulting in a considerably higher subjective poverty rate (13% in 2015 versus 8% in 2014). However, the high number of spontaneous answers corresponding to the “I'm poor” option in 2014 clarifies that self-identifying as poor is not primarily an artifact. It also shows that if identifying as poor is a socially devaluing answer that may lead to underestimating the subjective poverty rate, the intensity of that effect is probably limited: the “stigma” did not discourage 8% of respondents in 2014 from spontaneously identifying as poor even when that explicit answer had not been suggested to them.

In light of the impact of the response option change, the present article is based exclusively on data from the 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 survey waves.

#### **Wave 2018: The “Yellow vest” context**

The 2018 wave of the survey was collected between October 15 and December 1, a period of intensive social and political debate in France, with various decisions and projects about fiscal and welfare policy affecting pensioners, recipients of housing and unemployment benefits... a significant part of the interviews took place in the ascending trend period of the “Yellow vest” movement, since the first three – and more numerous – protestations were held on November 17, 24 and December 1.

**Wave 2018: Social insecurity module**

Following the first analysis of poverty feeling held with the DREES Opinion Barometer (Papuchon 2018, Duvoux and Papuchon 2018), a set of questions related to perceived social insecurity has been introduced in the core 2018 questionnaire. It aimed at addressing complementary tests of the indicator and at shedding more light on the first results drawn by the analysis.

Even if the use of these new questions leads to restrict the analysis to a single wave of data, we decided to complement the study of the 2015-2018 surveys by few analysis that are only available for 2018. We focused our attention on the following specific 2018 questions:

“Taking your resources into account, would you say your household has often / sometimes / rarely / never difficulties to make ends meet?”

“On the whole, would your household income are rather variable or rather stable, from one month to another?”

**II.2. Hypotheses**

On the one hand, a wide set of approaches and indicators of (subjective) poverty had been built and used in the literature. On the other hand, (income) poverty in France is notoriously concentrated on several subpopulations (Huillery et al. 2017). Young people and single-families are much more exposed to poverty, like in other OECD countries (2015). However, the concentration of poverty on long-term unemployed represents a specific feature of the French social context. Working poverty is weak in France if compared with Germany or the UK for instance (Ponthieux, 2009). The state of the art therefore leads to two sets of questions and hypotheses, one the one hand about the nature of subjective poverty as compared to other poverty indicators and its link with social class (H1) and, on the other hand, about our understanding of subjective poverty in contemporary France as an indicator of lasting social insecurity (H2).

- H1: Subjective poverty as a specific experience of social inequality
  - H1.1: Poverty is determined by the gap with the median standard of living (Relative income poverty hypothesis)
  - H1.2: Subjective poverty stems from having an income below a minimum level defined by the respondent (Subjective poverty line hypothesis)
  - H1.3: Subjective poverty stems from dependency to social benefits (Social assistance hypothesis)
  - H2.4: Subjective poverty is a dimension of working class life conditions (Social class hypothesis).
    - Social class has a net effect on subjective poverty (i).

- Industrial and service workers represent a significant part of those who feel poor (ii).
- H2 : Subjective poverty as an indicator of social insecurity within French working classes
- H2.1: Financial stress (Making ends meet hypothesis)
  - H2.2: The price of income instability : working class households with instable income are particularly vulnerable to subjective poverty
  - H2.3: Standing alone : Single adults face a higher risk of subjective poverty
  - H2.4: Subjective poverty is linked to a deteriorated future orientation

### III. Results

In this section, we address our two sets of hypotheses. Firstly, we compare our indicator with various poverty measures and show how they overlap and differ. We show that subjective poverty captures a specific experience of social inequality. Secondly, we dig into this subjective experience by showing its relationship with various aspects of social insecurity faced by French working classes.

#### III.1. Subjective poverty as a specific experience of social inequality (H1)

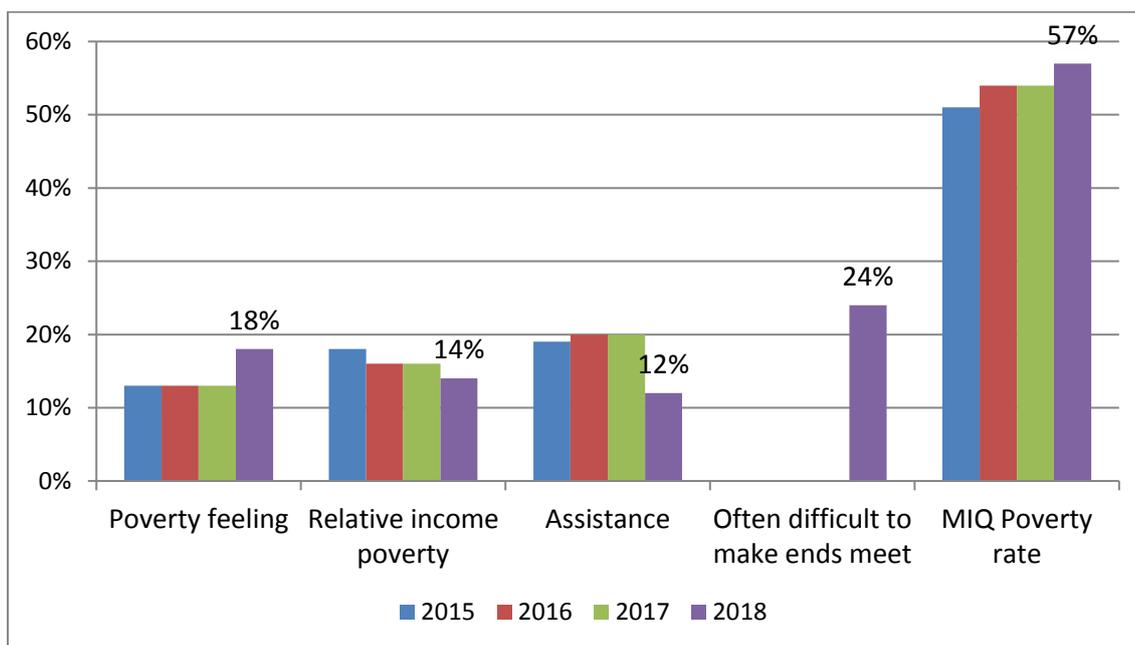
14 % of the 2015-2018 considers themselves as poor<sup>6</sup> (Figure 1), a figure very close to the standard income monetary indicator delivered by the French national institute for statistics and economic studies (14.2 % in 2015). From a descriptive standpoint, respondents identifying as poor can be divided into six categories (Figure 2): unemployed manual and lower white-collar workers, non-retired inactive persons, manual and lower white-collar workers with low job security or part-time jobs, and a residual category called “others,” difficult to describe given how few there are in the sample. Even in France, receiving welfare aid is thus clearly not the main variable driving subjective poverty: at least half of people who identify as poor are not in this situation. Over one-third are employed (among whom 1 in 4 belong to the working classes), and 1 in 6 is a retired lower-white-collar or blue-collar worker.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The resulting subjective poverty rate is 13% in 2015, 2016 and 2017 and 18 % in 2018. For more details on the recent increase of our indicator, see Box 2.

<sup>7</sup> Minimum old age benefit recipients are not monitored or in regular contact with the social services. More importantly, retirees are not thought of in France as welfare recipients since they contributed to the retirement system while working, which tends to legitimate their pension as an acquired entitlement rather than an act of collective solidarity.

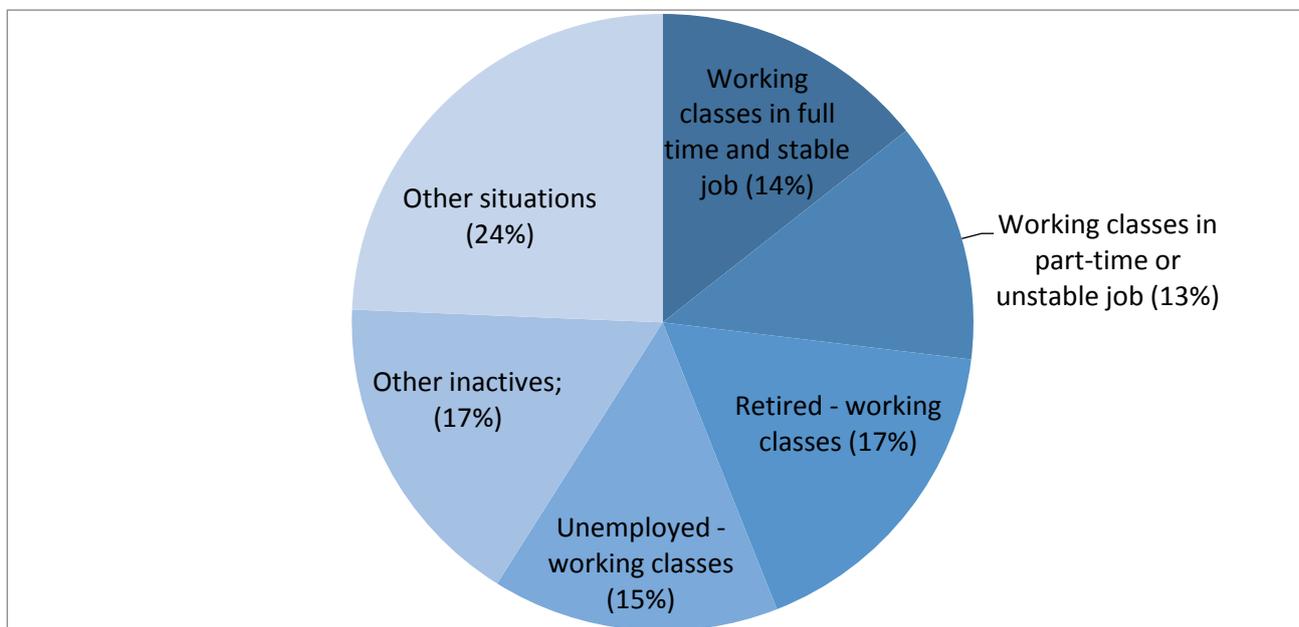
Figure 1 – Various poverty indicators and proxies



Population: People aged 18 or over living in metropolitan France.

Source: DREES Opinion barometer survey, 2015-2018.

Figure 2 – Who does feel poor?



Note: In the 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 survey waves, a combined total of 1,668 persons identified as poor (non-weighted). Each of the categories in the figure therefore comprises from 210 to 406 individuals.

(\*): This category covers people in full-time jobs with the exception of lower-level white-collar workers and blue-collar workers on an unstable job contract, put in the next category.

*Reading:* 16% of people who feel poor are working classes (clerks and service workers, industrial and agricultural workers) in unstable or part-time jobs.

*Population:* People 18 or over living in metropolitan France and identifying as poor.

*Source:* DREES Opinion barometer, 2015-2018.

**Table 1. – Factors of feeling poor (Logit model)**

Logit Model - Dependent variable : poverty feeling		Estimated coefficient
Age	<i>Numerical variable</i>	0,01 **
Income poverty	Living standard > 20 % above poverty line	Ref.
	Between poverty line and a 20 % higher living standard	0,76 ***
	Income poverty	1,08 ***
Consensual poverty	Above consensual poverty line	Ref.
	Under consensual poverty line	0,82 ***
Educational attainment	Vocational certificate or lower	0,22 **
	Secondary school diploma	Ref.
	2 years post-secondary education	- 0,12
	3+ years post-secondary education	- 0,21
Employment status	Permanent full-time job	Ref.
	Unstable or part-time job	0,42 ***
	Job seeker	0,61 ***
	Student or in training	0,31
	Retired or pre-retired	- 0,03
	Other unoccupied	1,30 ***
Sex	Women	Ref.
	Men	0,27 ***
Occupation	Small agricultural entrepreneur	0,56
	Other small entrepreneur	0,27
	Manager or professional	- 0,56 **
	Technician or associate professional employee	Ref.
	Clerk or service worker	0,61 ***
	Industrial or agricultural worker	0,46 ***
Family situation	Live alone	0,85 ***
	Member of a couple, no dependent children	Ref.
	Member of a couple, dependent children	- 0,03
	Single parent	0,87 ***
	Child	0,26
	Other	0,79 ***

Housing Occupancy status	Renter or receiving free accommodation	Ref.
	Owner	- 1,08 ***
Year	2015	Ref.
	2016	- 0,06
	2017	- 0,04
	2018	0,51 ***

Note: Pseudo  $R^2 = 0.23$  (adjusted McFadden's  $R^2$ ); 11,497 observations.

Population: People aged 18 or over living in metropolitan France.

Source: DREES Opinion barometer, 2015-2018.

**Table 2 – Income poverty and poverty feeling**

	Above income poverty line	Below income poverty line	Total
No poverty feeling	88%	12%	100%
Poverty feeling	58%	42%	100%
<i>Ensemble</i>	84%	16%	100%

Population: People aged 18 or over living in metropolitan France.

Source: DREES Opinion barometer, 2015-2018.

To explain the emergence of subjective poverty, we estimated a logistic regression model where self-identifying as poor is the dependent variable; the model integrates a diversity of “welfare dependency” situations, understood as situations in which those benefits correspond to recipients’ disposable income and recipients are monitored by and in regular contact with social services. The benefits in question are the “back-to-work incentive” or RSA, unemployment benefits, and disability-total infirmity-dependency benefits<sup>8</sup>. Other socio-demographic characteristics were integrated as control variables : respondent’s living standards quintile, educational attainment, occupational category and employment status, age bracket, family situation, sex, home occupancy status (owner or other), whether receiving a housing allowance <sup>9</sup>, and survey year.

What kind of empirical link is there between income poverty and the self-identification as poor? In Europe, poverty is often seen as resulting from a gap from the median standard of living (H1.1). All things being equal, having a living standard below the income poverty line strongly increases the risk of regarding himself as poor (Table 1). It’s also the case when it lies between the income poverty line and a 20% higher living standard. However, as the following results shall demonstrate, a lot more social characteristics still have a robust effect on feeling poor, after controlling for income poverty.

Moreover – and contrary to what would imply the “income poverty hypothesis” H1.1, 6 persons on 10 who feel poor would not be considered as poor from a standard monetary standpoint (Table 2). In our data, only one third of the monetary poor call themselves this

8 On this last point, respondents were asked whether or not their household had received “income from disability, infirmity, or dependency welfare benefits” in the last twelve months.

9 This benefit is designed for low-income households but does not involve regular contact with welfare services. As of 2016, a recipient living alone is granted a fixed allowance of 279€ for up to 379€ of income. Above that ceiling, the allowance diminishes as household income rises (Cabannes and Lelièvre 2016: 115).

way. Income and subjective poverty overlap but refer to partially distinct social groups. This finding is convergent with similar measures in other European countries, for example the work about Polish data led by Morawski and al. (2017).

The first SPL approach involves having respondents estimate the minimum income a person would need to “live decently” (H1.2). All things being equal, including after controlling for the income poverty status, a person whose living standard is below what he or she considers as this minimum income face a significantly higher risk of feeling poor (Table 1). However, using this criterion with our data results in a very high subjective poverty rate – the proportion of people whose effective living standard is below what they indicated as the minimum – of approximately 50% of the French population in the second half of the 2010s (Figure 1)<sup>10</sup>, well over the subjective poverty rate based on the poverty feeling indicator..

Entitlement to certain kind of social benefit may also constitute a decisive dimension of subjective poverty (H1.3), through the “disqualifying integration” process resulting from dependency to welfare state (Paugam, 2005). Having received the RSA in the preceding twelve months duplicates the probability of feeling poor, even with living standard, educational attainment, age, and family situation controlled for (Table 1), and the odds ratio associated with receiving a housing allowance is positive too<sup>11</sup>.

The risk of feeling poor also rises in case of unemployment, even if this could also be interpreted as an effect of the remoteness from the labor market, a factor of perceived exclusion and discrimination (Galland, 2016). Unemployed and unoccupied persons may be overexposed to poverty feeling, because having a job remains the dominant social integration norm in our society, the one that ensures individuals not only a stable income but also a relational network and the ability to project oneself into the future (Castel 1995)<sup>12</sup>.

The strong association between feeling poor and receiving welfare aid or being remote from the labor market should therefore not mask the impact of social characteristics unrelated to the welfare dimension. A particular set of variables integrated into our model (Table 1) – living standard, employment status, and socio-occupational position (Baudelot 2010) – brings to light the importance of social position for households that feel poor. If we look at the estimated effect of each of these variables, one aspect that stands out is the impact of what could be called a “subaltern constellation” (Schwartz, 2011); that is, a heterogeneous set of blue-collar and lower-level white collar workers whose characteristics are nonetheless similar enough to suggest that they all belong to the working classes (Siblot et al. 2015) (Social class hypothesis H1.4).

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10 The Eurobarometer data used by Paugam and Selz with a similar criterion indicated a poverty rate of 30% in 2001.

11 On the other hand, the estimated coefficient for disability-infirmity-dependency benefits is not significant, which may be due to the fact that the survey did not distinguish between those two benefit types and by the effect of the “no occupational activity” variable. If the latter is withdrawn from the model, the null hypothesis is rejected ( $p < 0.05$ ).

12 In our logit model, the “unoccupied” status effect may also partly capture an effect of position in the class structure. sixty percent of the “unoccupied” respondents – 9 in 10 of whom are women – belong to a cohabiting couple. When they are not the household reference person, their partner’s job status and occupational category is known: 44% of unoccupied women live with a blue-collar worker, whereas only 27% of other women do. The “unoccupied woman” status is not a “blank page” on which should be roughly written the status of her partner; but it must be noted that many unoccupied people belong to a working class household. Unfortunately, this cannot be taken into account by the model since we do not have status information for all partners.

With all else kept equal, having an unstable or part-time job rather than a permanent full-time one or being a blue-collar or lower-level white-collar worker rather than having a midlevel occupation very significantly increases the risk of subjective poverty (H1.4.i). Non-agricultural small entrepreneurs are also considerably more affected than midlevel occupations. These findings highlight the prevalence of feeling poor among the self-employed, especially given that the model controls for position in relation to monetary poverty. Unfortunately, the low sample numbers for these categories preclude a more detailed analysis of their situations.

Having an unstable job and belonging to the working classes (being employed or not, active or not) are decisive factors for feeling poor (H1.4.ii) as shown in figure 2.

### III.2. Subjective poverty as an indicator of social insecurity within French working classes (H2)

Thanks to the new “social insecurity module” of the 2018 questionnaire (Box 2), a wider variety of indicator can be compared to our subjective poverty variable, bringing a deeper insight into the social experience of inequality associated to poverty feeling.

**Table 3 – Difficult to make ends meet by poverty feeling**

Difficult to make ends meet	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
No poverty feeling	14%	33%	26%	27%	100%
Poverty feeling	67%	24%	5%	4%	100%
<i>Ensemble</i>	24%	32%	22%	23%	100%

*Population:* People aged 18 or over living in metropolitan France.

*Source:* DREES Opinion barometer, 2018.

**Table 4 – Poverty feeling by making ends meet difficulty**

Difficult to make ends meet	No poverty feeling	Poverty feeling	Total
Never	97%	3%	100%
Rarely	96%	4%	100%
Sometimes	86%	14%	100%
Often	49%	51%	100%
<i>Ensemble</i>	82%	18%	100%

*Population:* People aged 18 or over living in metropolitan France.

*Source:* DREES Opinion barometer, 2018.

As anticipated with hypothesis 2.1, subjective poverty strongly corresponds to financial stress, since 2 in 3 persons who feel poor often have difficulties to make ends meet and 9 in 10 “often” or “sometimes” experience this financial stress (Table 3). Nevertheless, only half of those who are often affected by financial stress regard themselves as poor (Table 4), in spite of the high rate of subjective poverty observed in 2018. Financial stress therefore seems

be a larger issue than subjective poverty, while being a determinant aspect of this phenomenon. This finding helps differentiating degrees of social insecurity. We will see below why the narrower population concerned with subjective poverty can be adequately described as having to cope with *lasting* social insecurity.

**Table 5 – Activity status pattern of people with instable income**

Active persons : current (or last) occupation	Instable income
<i>Total</i>	32%
Small agricultural entrepreneur	78%
Other small entrepreneur	59%
Manager or professional	24%
Technician or associate professional employee	18%
Clerk or service worker	32%
Industrial or agricultural worker	39%
Retired	7%
Other inactive	46%

*Population:* Currently active persons aged 18 or over living in metropolitan France.

*Source:* DREES Opinion barometer, 2018.

The proportion of people with instable income varies tremendously between social groups, from 7 % of pensioners to 2 third of the small entrepreneurs and 4 industrial and agricultural workers in 10 (1 managers and professionals in 4) (Table 5). These differences may seem self-evident, but they have huge implications in terms of social structure and experience of inequality that seem very underestimated, in the French case at least. First, a larger part of industrial and agricultural workers than of managers and professionals declare they receive a rather instable income. Second, as shown by table 6, the price of income instability in terms of subjective poverty risk vary within the social structure (H2.2): nearly no manager or professional feel poor, including when they declare an instable income. Subjective poverty remains quite uncommon among technicians and associated professional employees with instable income (1 in 9); by contrast, 1 in 3 industrial and agricultural workers with instable income consider themselves as poor. Third, income instability is a noticeable dimension of poverty feeling among the active members of the working classes, but the poverty feeling of retired members of the working classes must be related to other social characteristics of their position.

**Table 6 – Subjective poverty and income instability, by social class**

Active persons who feel poor	Rather stable income	Rather instable income
<i>Total</i>	12%	22%
Manager or professional	1%	2%
Technician or associate professional employee	7%	13%
Clerk or service worker	18%	27%
Industrial or agricultural worker	24%	35%

*Population:* Currently active persons who feel poor and are aged 18 or over, living in metropolitan France.

*Source:* DREES Opinion barometer, 2018.

Another dimension of understanding subjective poverty as insecure social condition is stated by our H2.3 hypothesis (“standing alone hypothesis”), which asserts that single adults face a higher risk of subjective poverty. This proposition can be tested on the basis of all 4 survey waves at our disposal.

The model in table 1 reveals that being single or a lone parent rather than having a partner (without children) affects the probability of feeling poor (Table 1). Having a partner and dependent children rather than no children, however, does not have a significant impact. The OECD has repeatedly pointed out that family composition plays an increasingly important role in poverty distribution in developed countries, at least in connection with single parent families (OECD 2008, 2011, 2015). In bringing to light the protective effect of having a partner on feeling poor and the problematic situation that single parent families are in when the impact of monetary poverty has been controlled for, our approach exposes poor people hitherto invisible – single persons whose standard of living puts them above the poverty threshold – but also groups that are overexposed to combined monetary and subjective poverty. Globally speaking, somewhat more than one third of the persons in the sample live alone or is a single parent, but it is the case of a much larger part of those who feel poor: 2 women in 3 and almost 6 man in 10 and (Table 7).

**Table 7 – Subjective poverty and family configuration**

Among persons who feel poor	Live alone	Member of a couple, no dependent children	Member of a couple, dependent children	Single parent	Child	Other	<i>Total</i>
<i>Total</i>	31%	37%	16%	7%	7%	2%	100%
Women	42%	14%	12%	24%	5%	2%	100%
Men	52%	23%	10%	4%	8%	4%	100%

*Population:* Currently active persons who feel poor and are aged 18 or over, living in metropolitan France.

*Source:* DREES Opinion barometer, 2015-2018.

Last, our data show that even poverty apprehended in terms of self-perception alone is associated with how individuals perceive their position in the social structure, particularly what that position is likely to be in the future (H2.4). The main contribution of sociology to the subjective poverty approach may well lie in its finding that people who feel poor all view their individual futures with apprehension. This shared experience transcends whether or not they are receiving welfare aid, as well as where they stand in relation to the monetary poverty threshold.

That's why we qualify subjective poverty as an indicator of perceived lasting social insecurity, or as a perceived condition of social insecurity. Subjective poverty thus enables us to identify which social groups are exposed to viewing their future grimly even though they are neither assessed as poor nor assisted on that basis at the present time. Two-thirds of people who feel poor are pessimistic about their personal future, a situation found for only half of people actually living below the poverty line or receiving welfare aid, and 42% of the entire sample (Table 8). Anticipated trajectory has a robust effect, even when the effects of the independent variables introduced in our model presented in table 1 are controlled for. With other variables kept equal, the estimated probability of feeling poor is 18% for personal-future pessimists and 11% for optimists.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 8- Poverty and anticipated social trajectory (%)**

<i>Proportion of personal-future pessimists</i>	Below the poverty line	Above the poverty line	Not on welfare	On welfare	Often difficult to make ends meet	Total
No poverty feeling	45%	40%	40%	47%	61%	40%
Poverty feeling	64%	67%	66%	66%	79%	66%
Total	51%	42%	42%	54%	70%	44%

*Reading:* 45% of people living below the poverty line but not identifying as poor are pessimistic about their future.

*Population:* People 18 or over living in metropolitan France.

*Source:* DREES Opinion barometer, 2015-2018.

The importance for feeling poor of perceived change in social situation enables us to better understand the persistence of significant rates of subjective poverty among retirees, a group which represents a similar share as the unemployed among people who feel poor. This phenomenon has been masked by the development and gradual generalization of mandatory public retirement systems in France, which considerably reduced older persons' exposure to income poverty without dispelling a feeling of social insecurity. Our approach brings that feeling to light.

13 Standardized probabilities estimated using Model 2 after adding the variables of perceived status fall and anticipated trajectory using the "experimental standard deviation" method. For a discussion of the issues involved in presenting logit coefficients as predicted probabilities and a comparison of "experimental" and "pure" methods for obtaining such probabilities, see the debate between Marion Selz and Jérôme Deauvieu in the *Bulletin de méthodologie sociologique* (Deauvieu 2010, 2011; Deauvieu and Selz 2011).

Among retirees, not owning one's home represents a major source of social inequality, identifying people whose standard of living is likely to fall as rents rise and who have relatively little in the way of accumulated resources. Non-homeowner retirees are heavily overexposed to feeling poor (23%, as opposed to 11% of all retirees, Table 9), much more so than the rest of the population: there are at a 2.1 times higher risk of feeling poor than all retirees while non-retiree non-homeowners' risk is "only" 1.5 times higher than all non-retirees'.

**Table 9 - Retirees who do not own their home are particularly overexposed to feeling poor (%)**

Rate of subjective poverty	Retirees	Non-retirees
Homeowners	5%	5%
Non-homeowners	23%	22%
Total	11%	15%

*Population:* People 18 or over living in metropolitan France.

*Source:* DREES Opinion barometer, 2015-2018.

Testing interaction effects between home-owning and employment status shows that the protection from feeling poor offered by being a homeowner is significantly greater among retirees than among people working full-time jobs ( $p < 0.05$ ) or unemployed people ( $p < 0.001$ ), even when main personal characteristics as designated by our Model variables (Table 1) are controlled for<sup>14</sup>. This finding may be due, on one hand, to the effect on working-age homeowners of being in debt—a question beyond the scope of this study—and, on the other, to retirees' fear of a gradual fall in living standard caused by a fall in the value of their pensions relative to rent expenses.

## IV. Discussion and Theoretical Implications

In this section, we put forward the analytic gains of our indicator not only vis-à-vis other subjective economic stress indicators but also in the broader context of the discussions on the role of expertise and social actors in defining poverty. We argue that subjective poverty is rooted in current material conditions and provide relevant information on the social structure. First and foremost, the empirical comparison between our direct measure of subjective poverty and the dependent variable most commonly used to measure subjective poverty ("making ends meet" question) leads to a sociological and conceptual distinction. The population concerned with subjective poverty is narrower than the one affected by subjective economic stress. Given the importance of the degraded perspective of the former groups rooted in their current instability, they can be adequately described as having to cope with a deeper form of social insecurity that we label as "lasting" to capture its dynamic dimension.

<sup>14</sup> This interaction effect is robust for the period 2015-2017. Its sign turned to be negative in 2018, corresponding to a noticeable increase in the subjective poverty risk affecting the pensioners who own their house in the specific context of the 2018 survey (increase of the taxes paid by pensioners, beginning of the Yellow vest movement (Box 2)).

Table 10 – Synoptic table of the main poverty indicators

Poverty indicator	Relative monetary poverty	Subjective poverty line	Poverty feeling	Financial stress
Main variable	Living standard	Minimum income (self-defined)	Perceived situation	Making ends meet
Social phenomenon	Inequality (bottom of the distribution)	Privation	Lasting social insecurity	Financial constraint / Limited capability
Advantages	Highly comparable data available	No preestablished threshold	No preestablished definition	Comparable data available Standard indicator
Drawbacks	Arbitrary threshold Sensitive to change in median income Sensitive to "halo" size	Difficult to understand the meaning of "minimum" income for the respondents Very high poverty rates	Seldom used Potentially heterogeneous measurement modes	Focused on financial aspects Wording variations in the survey question
Poverty rate found for France in 2016 (main source)	13.9 % (ERFS)	54 % (DREES Barometer) 30 % (2001, Eurobarometer 56.1)	13 % (DREES Barometer)	19,2% (EU-SILC) 24% (2018, DREES Barometer)

Note: \* The absolute definitions used in the United States, for example, pertain to this dimension and are determined on the basis of consumption goods. An advantage of this type of approach is that it offers a representation of survival conditions in a given society. A disadvantage is that their view of the phenomenon is extremely reductive.

#### IV.1. Enlarging without loosening poverty measure

If we go back to the controversy aroused in the early 1980's, it is clear that a difference between a large vs a narrow conception of poverty was at play in the debate between Townsend on the one hand, Mack and Lansley and Amartya Sen on the other hand. In "A Rejoinder to Professor Amartya Sen" (1985a), Townsend argued that separating subjective from objective aspects of deprivation was critical to identify and measure poverty (1985a: p.660-1). Mack and Lansley replied that the perceptions can determine the importance and significance that should be attached to the various aspects of our living standards (1985: 38), proposing a quite loose definition of consensual methods. Thanks to our indicator of subjective poverty, we have the opportunity to abide by the requirement put forward by the

advocates of consensual methods (do not impose from the outside a definition of poverty) without having to refer to anything else than their direct self-identification as poor.

At the same time, we can convert one of Townsend's objections to consensual methods into an advantage. According to him, "false consciousness is not an important sociological concept for nothing" (1985b: p.44). The social institutions of capitalism, the state and family enslave individuals by shaping their lives and hence their needs. People do not recognize the forces which drive them, and these facts "oblige us to look for criteria of need other than in social perceptions". In our view, the incorporation of social institutions measured through a direct subjective poverty measure is a piece of information of great importance. Among these institutions, the weight of (negative) identities related to means-tested programs entitlement appears as a key finding of our study. In the neoliberal era, means-tested anti-poverty programs have grown as a result of the contraction of wider (insurance-based) social protection schemes. Social assistance has been disregarded as a relevant poverty indicator so far as it was too sensitive to policy reform. Yet, drawing on German sociologist Georg Simmel's seminal work, Paugam (1991) has shown how important entitlement could be in framing identities. This has been demonstrated in testing the causal effect of being entitled on feeling poor. Thus, the variety of social mechanisms and institutions that contribute to regulating and controlling the poor, leading them to incorporate state categories, can find a place in our analysis (Immervoll et al. 2015). Thus, subjective poverty measures allow to bridge and not to separate the assumptions of various and opposite strands of poverty literature.

After having sharply declined during the second half of the twentieth century, the uses of the word "poverty" have surged in the aftermath of the economic downturn of the 1970's. They are closely related to the extension of means-tested schemes and long-term unemployment. So there is no surprise that the populations enrolled in these programs massively consider themselves as poor. Yet, our results show that the social and institutional construction of poverty is partially uncoupled with entitlement. Our data tend to show that subjective poverty is related to social and economic insecurity rather than with antipoverty programs. The share of the population who feels poor cannot project oneself positively in the future more than it is subject to a lack of income or to material deprivation. Nonetheless, the residual character of professionals and, more generally, of populations with medium or high levels of income from our subpopulation leads us to think that our subjective indicator of poverty captures something else than one's personal unmet expectations in terms of status or income<sup>15</sup>.

## IV.2. Towards a micro-level indicator of attitude to time's distribution

In France as in many other Northern countries, there is a discrepancy between the strength of class inequalities on the one hand and the weakness of class consciousness on the other hand (Coulangeon, 2004). So, subjective views of social structure could be considered as irrelevant and « false consciousness » in a neoliberal society putting forward the narrative of

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<sup>15</sup> The "Managers or professionals" and the "Technicians or associate professional employees" represent 3 % and 6 % of those who declare that they are poor, respectively. The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> standard of living quintiles represent 2 % and 3 % of the subjectively poor.

the self-entrepreneur (Hall & Lamont, 2012). However, that would be misleading. The subjective is, per se, social, collective (Bourdieu, 2017). Of course Bourdieu's determinist sociology did never consider subjectivity as a genuine indication of how class matter in shaping lives. However, he did put forward the idea that no structural analysis could be made without taking subjectivity seriously. In his early works on the Algerian working-class, he related closely the way social actors envisioned their future or the possible they could reach to their material and economic current conditions. He recalls that "the attitude toward the future objectively rooted in the material conditions of existence" is a major principle of social differentiation (Bourdieu, 1977: 8). The dynamic dimension of social insecurity distinguishes it from more static approaches to inequality. This does not prevent social insecurity from being the firm base of a social condition that is spreading for some populations in a context of fast-changing occupational and conjugal situations and in connection with a view of collective and individual futures that is marked by uncertainty. Casualization of work and the spread of precarity lead to a decreasing of stability for a large share of the working classes. The lack of wealth is particularly salient for retirees that are condemned to subjective, if not income, poverty when they are renters.

Bourdieu has proposed a solution to bridge subjective and objective aspects of social life in a single perspective. To him, a genuine sociological understanding of social life could not emerge without taking into account both sides together, and time is precisely the notion that allows to consider objective and subjective views as complementary perspectives on social life. In the end, linking time-orientation to actual material conditions and calling "poverty" a specific configuration of material conditions and relation to time has been a key descriptive feature of poverty in modern capitalist societies for decades (Lazarsfeld et al. 1933; Lewis, 1966), while raising controversies over the fact that poor people themselves could be blamed for not being future-oriented enough. Yet, our variable of subjective poverty confirms how important time-orientation is in considering poverty but does so in a way that prevent from blaming the victims of social disorders as well as welfare retrenchment.

This discussion is not limited to poverty debates. As a matter of fact, in societies where wealth concentration (Piketty, 2014) highlights the extent to which the past is weighing on the present (Savage, 2014) one cannot escape the fact that having a micro-level attitude to time indicator can be of great help to take the multidimensional set of resources at play in contemporary's societies into account while building poverty and inequality indicators.

### **IV.3. From Sen's capability perspective to a sociological assessment of disadvantage in a given modern capitalist society**

Last, it seems important to raise a point that can only be evoked and not treated as such, given the magnitude of the issues at play: the relationship of our indicator of subjective poverty with the capability approach and its implications for poverty analysis. As put forward recently (Hick, 2012), Sen's capability has done much to move poverty literature beyond income poverty. Having elaborated an indicator of poverty that is not income-based, we of course see a convergence with Sen's endeavor. However, it seems to us that our approach is close to Sen's one in a more fundamental way: it allows to go beyond purely relativistic views and to identify an "absolute" core of poverty (Sen, 1985). Yet, this absolute core is not

a normative one, labeled by Sen as an ability to make choices for one's life and thus framed in terms of capability, but rather a sociological one.

If we consider that our subjective poverty indicator allows us to capture micro-level attitude to time, thus those who are poor are those who are unable to envision their future in a positive way and thus to be future-oriented. In modern capitalist societies geared towards the future, both for political and economic reasons (Wagner, 2002), being unable to project oneself positively is a direct and absolute manifestation of disadvantage. Of course, this absoluteness is dependent on the construction of modern societies and of a given capitalist regime of accumulation, yet, these latter strands seem stable enough as material and symbolic frames to consider that the inability to abide by their requirements is an "absolute" disadvantage. In this context, and as in Sen's view of capability, income and commodities are means towards an end, which is here defined as an ability to have a positive attitude toward one's future. In an era where poor people are trapped in a long-term instability (Morduch and Schneider, 2017) and precariousness, currently being able to project oneself is a privilege and a way to investigate the weight of resources concentration from the standpoint of social actors themselves.

### **Conclusion: Towards a Sociological Understanding of Subjective Poverty**

Multiple lessons can be drawn from the previous analysis. First, following a clearly established strand of literature, our research helps differentiate the groups concerned with relative monetary poverty on the one hand and with subjective poverty on the other hand. As other researches led in various European countries show, subjective poverty rate is close to relative monetary poverty rate. Yet, the populations concerned are different. In the case of France, a large group of near poor made up of industry and service workers, petty retirees and small entrepreneurs appear whereas it is not monetarily poor. The Yellow Vest protests have recently highlighted the importance and widespread feeling of being left behind among these groups (Duvoux and Papuchon, 2019).

Second, our analysis lead to extend the analysis of inequality. Following the seminal works of those who have tended to incorporate stigmatization and self-identification in the study of inequality, our work highlights the relevance of linking statistical analysis and the study of the perception of one's social status. Our indicator reveals, at the individual level, the effects of the casualization of work and of welfare state retrenchment. A structural instability results in the objective and perceived perspectives of those who are affected by a self-identification as poor. More precisely, our direct indicator of subjective poverty reveals the close relationship between current instability and inability to project positively in the future, a critical social norm, yet far from being equally accessible to members of all social groups in Western societies. Thus, we developed the idea that subjective poverty was an indicator of lasting social insecurity.

Third, class has been key in the works that analyzed the spread of subjective socio-economic stress in various countries (Whelan and Maître, 2009 ; Mau et al. 2012). However, neither the economists who had put forward the notion of subjective poverty or happiness and life-

satisfaction distribution's studies do integrate sociological accounts of the causes nor of the subjective consequences of widespread social insecurity. We claim for a stronger attention to social class backgrounds as well as to meaning-making processes. By highlighting this point, our work converge with one the most essential lessons of Amartya Sen. This latter showed the importance to study the subjective aspects of inequality by differentiating them not only from purely monetary indicators but also from orthodox happiness and life-satisfaction. Our work tries to advance this agenda, even if it does by a reference to positively described social norms of orientation towards the future instead of the normative vision of the promotion of capability.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. — *Respondents' sociodemographic characteristics**(2015-2017 survey waves)*

DREES Opinion barometer, 2015-	N
“Do you think there is a risk that you, personally, could become poor in the coming years?”	5
Yes, a fairly high one	526
No, probably not	2
I'm already poor	261
[NA]	1
	153
	130
Monetary poverty (60% threshold)	7
Standard of living above threshold	232
Monetarily poor	1
	426
What's your current employment situation?	
Working full time	3
Working part time	460
Working sporadically	758
Looking for a job	157
Student	894
Retired or on preretirement	357
No occupational activity	2
Vous n'exercez aucune activité professionnelle	779
	665

Are you on ...? (*)	
An open-ended contract [includes civil servants or civil servants on internship]	5 780
A limited-time contract	929
Temp work	277
No contract	169
[NA]	7
“What’s your occupation?” (**)	
Small agricultural entrepreneur	107 492
Other small entrepreneur	1 418
Manager or professional	1 715
Technician-associate pro employee	2 402
Clerk or service worker	1 814
Industrial or agricultural worker	1 122
Unoccupied	
“In the last twelve months did your household receive income in the form of ...?”	616
Back-to-work incentive (RSA)	1
Unemployment benefits	231
Housing assistance (APL or other)	2 224
Disability-infirmity-dependency benefits (AAH, APA, PCH or other) ?	733
Total sample	9 070

Note: \*: Question asked working wage earners, retired wage earners, and persons on unemployment after losing their most recent job.

\*\* : Interviewer recoded respondents’ answers.

## Appendix 2

<u>Survey classification</u>	<u>ESeG classification</u>
<b>Small agricultural entrepreneurs</b>	Small agricultural entrepreneurs – [ESeG : 4.1]
<b>Other small entrepreneurs</b>	Technicians, clerical support, services and sales self-employed workers [ESeG : 4.2] Craft and related trades self-employed workers [ESeG : 4.3]
<b>Managers and Professionals</b>	Managers [ESeG : 1] Professionals [ESeG : 2] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For Teaching professionals [ESeG : 2.5], University and Higher Teachers only</li> </ul>
<b>Technicians and associated professionals employees</b>	Technicians and associated professionals employees [ESeG 3] Teaching professionals [ESeG : 2.5], excluding University and Higher education teachers
<b>Clerks and service workers</b>	Clerks and skilled service employees [ESeG : 5] Personal services and sales employees [ESeG : 7.1] Cleaners and helpers and services employees in elementary occupations [ESeG : 7.3]
<b>Industrial and agricultural workers</b>	Industrial skilled employees [ESeG : 6] Blue collar employees and food preparation assistants in elementary occupations [ESeG : 7.2] Agricultural employees [ESeG : 7.4]