The subjective implications of social class: Evidence from 38 countries

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Research Question

Does objective class position affect subjective class identification?



Death of class?

- Class as a "zombie" concept (Beck 2002)
- Other aspects of inequality more important than class(Giddens 1991)
- Class, as a means to understand society, has disintegrated (Pakulksi and Waters 1996)
- Connection between objective and subjective class is weak

Data used



International Social Survey Programme



• 2009 Social Inequality Module

Variables



Class

- Class is operationalised using the European Socioeconomic Classification (ESeC)
- Based theoretically on a Weberian interpretation of class
- Based conceptually on Goldthorpe's class schema
- ESeC represents a composite measure of class
- Component variables include: occupation, employment status, supervisory status, number of employees and size of establishment.

3-Class version

ESeC class	10-class version	6-class version ^a	5-class version	3-class version
Higher salariat	1	1+2	1+2	1+2
Lower salariat	2			
Higher white collar	3	3+6	3+6	3+4+5+6
Petite bourgeois	4	4+5	4+5	
Small farmers	5			
Higher grade blue collar	6	3+6	3+6	
Lower white collar	7	7	7	7+8+9
Skilled manual	8	8	8+9	
Semi-/non-skilled	9	9		
Unemployed	(10)	(10)	(10)	(10)

Source: (Pp. 21)Rose, David and Eric Harrison, eds. 2010. *Social Class in Europe : An Introduction to the European Socio-Economic Classification*. Oxon: Routledge.

Subjective class

22. Most people see themselves as belonging to a particular class. Please tell us which social class you would say you belong to?

Lower class	
Working class	2
Lower middle class	3
Middle class	4
Upper middle class	s
Upper class	6

Source: ISSP 2009

Subjective Class Responses

	Global	China	Denmark	Spain	Australia	Sweden	Russia	U.S.
Lower Class	8.48	24.75%	2.07%	3.63%	2.95%	1.43%	6.96%	4.15%
Working Class	27.09%	22.06%	17.54%	40.05%	21.46%	24.04%	29.84%	35.91%
Lower Middle Class	17.66%	20.93%	13.99%	18.99%	18.51%	12.06%	16.24%	13.2%
Middle Class	38.99%	30.07%	51.67%	35.09%	44.27%	48.61%	43.39%	39.03%
Upper Middle Class	7.24%	2.03%	14.19%	2.15%	12.54%	12.87%	3.45%	6.82%
Upper Class	.54%	.17%	.54%	.08%	.27%	.98%	.13%	.89%
Missing Cases	5829	-	24	4	34	18	8	13
Total	49409	3010	1494	1211	1491	1119	1595	1568

Source: ISSP 2009

Why are people wrong?

- Reference group processes (Merton 1957, Evans and Kelley 2004)
- Class shame (Sennett and Cobb 1973)
- Class disidentification (Skeggs 1997)



Mean Subjective Class by Country



Source: ISSP 2009, Social Inequality Module

AR-Argentina AU-Australia	BE-Belgium	BG-Bulgaria	CL-Chile	CN-China	TW-Taiwan
Working Class Working Class	Working Class	Working Class	Working Class	Working Class	Working Class
Intermedia e Class Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class	Intermed ate Class
Salariat Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat
0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5 0 .5 1 1.5 2 2	.5 0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5	0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5	0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5	0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5	0 .5 1 1.5 2 2.5
HR-Croatia CY-Cyprus	CZ-Czech Republic	DK-Denmark	EE-Estonia	FI-Finland	DE-Germany
Working Class	Working Class	Working Class	Workirg Class	Working Class	Workin: Class
Intermediate Cass	Intermediate Class	Intermediate (Jass	Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class	Intermediate Oass
Salariat Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat
hull-Hungapy benchard			IP- Japan	KR-South Korea	
	Warking Case	Wotine Close	Wating		
Intermediate Class		Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class	
Salariat Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat
NZ-New Zealand NO-Norway	PL-Poland	PT-Portugal	RU-Russia	SK-Slovak Republic	SI-Slovenia
Working Class Working elase	Working Class	Working Class	Working Class	Workin: Class	Working Class
Intermediate Class Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class	Intermed ate Class	Intermedia e Class	Intermediate C ass	Intermediate Class
Salariat Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat
ZA-South Africa ES-Spain	SE-Sweden	CH-Switzerland	TR-Turkey	UA-Ukraine	United Kingdom
Working Blass Working Class	Working Class	Working Class	Working Class	Worting Class	Working Class
Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class	Intermediate Cass	Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class	Intermediate Class
Salaria Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat	Salariat

US-United States VE-Venezuela Workin Work Intermedi Intern

Salariat

The effects of class are seen in all countries

Odds ratios for subjective class responses

	China	Germany	South	UK	Sweden	Russia	U.S.	Venezuela	
			Africa		\frown				
Intermedia	.67**	.60**	1.99***	.44***	.37***	.64*	.80	.65	
te Class									
(Salariat									
referent)									Vat the
	(.09)	(.10)	(.30)	(.08)	(.07)	(.13)	(.11)	(.18)	ret, the
Working	35***	19***	2 63***	34***	14***	26***	52***	64	effects of
Class	.55		2.03	.51		.20	.52	.01	class are
	(.05)	(.03)	(.38)	(.06)	(.03)	(.04)	(.07)	(.19)	more
University	1.03	1.22***	.89***	1.22***	1.15***	1.29***	1.30***	1.09**	pronounced
Degree									in some
	(.02)	(.18)	(.01)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	countries
Female	1.08	1.46	1.15	1.16	1.12	.80	1.11	1.21	
	(.09)	(.17)**	(.12)	(.16)	(.15)	(.10)	(.11)	(.20)	South Africa
Age	1.00	1.01***	.99*	1.01**	1.00	.99**	1.02***	1.00	is a strange
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	case indeed
Likelihood	93.89***	375.76***	180.36***	142.73***	256.06***	406.23***	300.22***	22.63***	
ratio Chi ²									
Pseudo R ²	.02	.16	.06	.10	.14	.18	.11	.03	
Ν	2477	1238	1753	877	1008	1371	1488	624	

Note: standard errors in parentheses; *p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

Predicted Probabilities of the Salariat Class identifying with the "correct" class, by Education



Predicted Probabilities of the Working Class identifying with the "correct class", by Educatio



Preliminary Implications

- Class matters
- Working classes identify with the "correct" class when they have limited education
- Highly educated salariat are likely to identify with the positions they objectively occupy
- Relationship between objective class position and self-placement is "crystallised" at the limits of class and education

Thank you!

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