Two measures of subjective social status – how do objective indicators relate to subjective evaluation?

Miloslav Bahna
Institute for Sociology, Slovak Academy of Sciences
Roman Džambazovič, Comenius University

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Do those two questions measure the same?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective social class:</th>
<th>Top bottom:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Lower class</td>
<td>1 Top</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Working class</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Upper working</td>
<td>..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Middle</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Upper middle</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Upper</td>
<td>10 Bottom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s alpha and correlation suggest similarity...
Short history

• In 2002 the top bottom question replaced the subjective class question in the ISSP BG variables (why?)

• Since 1992 both questions were used simultaneously in the ISSP Social Inequality modules (1992, 1999, 2009).
Usual use of subjective status

• Assessing strength of connection between objective and subjective status
• Finding differences in the relation between objective and subjective status among men and women
• Searching for connection between subjective social status, political attitudes and preferences
How strong is the connection between objective and subjective status?

- OLS regression on ISSP 1999 data
- Dependent variables – subjective social class and top bottom scale
- Independent variables – education, personal income, occupation (ISEI), age
- Results for full time employed men only
  (literature expects women to use partner’s characteristics in status assessment too)
$R^2$ adj. - variance explained by education, occupation and income
The question

• In all countries objective variables explain more variance on subjective class placement than on top bottom placement

• Why?
Influence of education higher on subjective social class than on top bottom answers

Difference between OLS coefficients for social class and top-bottom, ISSP 1999
Influence of occupation higher on subjective social class than on top bottom answers

Difference between OLS coefficients for social class and top bottom, ISSP 1999
Where are the ISCO 88 8000 codes?

Top bottom scale; mean = 0.34

Subjective class; mean = 0.42
Influence of income on subjective social class and on top bottom answers – no clear pattern

Difference between OLS coefficients for social class and top bottom, ISSP 1999
Summary

• Across all countries tested from the ISSP 1999 survey objective social status variables explain more of the subjective social class variation than of the top bottom answers.
• Main reason - lower importance of education and occupation when placing oneself on the top bottom scale.
• Similar results with the ISSP 1992 data.
Hypothesis

• Categories in subjective social class serve as guidelines for self placement (guess: working class category expulses non–manual employees into higher social class categories)

• The objective - subjective connection is thus inflated
The experiment

• What happens, when we exclude the „working class“ answer category?

• The 2009 ISSP modules in Czech Republic and in Slovakia employ a modified subjective class question that was used together with the „classic“ subjective class and top-bottom questions.
The results: Slovakia 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective class without working class</th>
<th>Top bottom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beta</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sig.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>0.162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R² adjusted | 0.385 | 0.329 | 0.267 |
## The results: Czech Republic 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective class without working class</th>
<th>Subjective class</th>
<th>Top bottom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.323</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.172</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.125</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2 adjusted</td>
<td>0.240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Modified social class compared to ISSP social class:

- Education influence on self-placement is weaker
- Influence of occupation on self-placement is weaker
- Variance explained by education, income and occupation is lower
- Result: modified social class is closer to top-bottom question results, but still inflates the education influence on subjective placement – is this "the middle class effect"?
Conclusion

- Although seemingly similar, subjective social class and top bottom scale results differ systematically.
- Subjective social class questions „tell“ the respondents, where they should place themselves, top – bottom does not.
- Subjective social class questions therefore exaggerate the influence of education and occupation on subjective placement in the social hierarchy.
- This results in overstating the connection between subjective evaluation of position in social hierarchy and objective social status.