

"interaction" compound, H<sub>2</sub>O. If class and gender behaved this way then perhaps it would be useful to introduce a new concept, "clender," to designate the interaction term itself. In general, however, the claim that class and gender "interact" in generating effects does not imply that there are no additive effects. This means that some of what is consequential about gender occurs independently of class and some of what is consequential about class occurs independently of gender. The task of class analysis, then, is to sort out these various kinds of effects.

In chapters 7, 8 and 9 we will explore several of these forms of interconnection of class and gender. Chapter 7 discusses the problem of the class location of married women in dual-earner families. It is thus an investigation of the ways in which gender mediates class locations. The chapter also includes an analysis of the effects of the interaction of the class composition of households and gender on class identity. Chapter 8 explores the ways in which class locations might shape one important facet of gender relations – the sexual division of labor in the home. Finally, chapter 9 looks in detail at one specific aspect of the way gender sorts people into class locations – the differential access to position of workplace authority of men and women.

## 7. Individuals, families and class analysis

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Consider the following list of households in which family members are engaged in different kinds of jobs:

### *Employment composition of household*

<i>Wife's job</i>	<i>Husband's job</i>
1 Typist, full time	No husband
2 Typist, full time	Factory worker
3 Typist, full time	Lawyer
4 Typist, part time	Lawyer
5 Lawyer	Lawyer
6 Lawyer	Factory worker
7 Homemaker	Factory worker
8 Homemaker	Lawyer

What is the appropriate way of defining the social class of each of the individuals in this list? For some of the cases, there is no particular difficulty: the women in the first two households and the man in the second would usually be considered working class, while both people in the fifth household, "middle" class. Similarly, the class of the homemakers in cases 7 and 8 would generally be identified with the class of their husbands.<sup>1</sup> The other cases, however, have no uncontroversial

<sup>1</sup> Some feminists would object to deriving the class location of full-time housewives from the class of their husbands. Such critics insist that the social relations of domination within the household should also be treated as a "class relation." One rationale for this claim treats production in the household as a distinctive mode of production, sometimes called the "domestic mode of production." In capitalist societies, it is argued, this mode of production is systematically structured by gender relations of domination and subordination. As a result, within the domestic mode of production, the domestic laborer (the housewife) occupies a distinctive exploited and dominated class position in relation to the nonlaborer (the male "head of household"). This effectively places

solutions. In particular, how should we understand the class location of married women in the labor force when their jobs have a different class character from that of their husbands? Intuitively, it seems that a typist married to a factory worker is not in the same class as a typist married to a lawyer, even if the jobs of the two typists are indistinguishable. And yet, to simply say that the second typist is "middle" class seems to relegate her own job to irrelevance in class analysis. In class terms she would become indistinguishable from the woman lawyer in case 5. And what about the woman lawyer married to a worker? It seems very odd to say that she is in the same class as the typist married to a factory worker. Many feminists have strongly objected to equating a married woman's class with her husband's, arguing, to use Joan Acker's (1973) formulation, that this is an example of "intellectual sexism." And yet, to identify her class position strictly with her own job also poses serious conceptual problems. A typist married to a lawyer is likely to have a very different life style, and above all very different economic and political interests from a typist married to a factory worker.

Of course, if these kinds of "cross-class" household compositions were rare phenomena, then this issue of classification would not have great empirical importance, even if it still raised interesting theoretical issues. However, as we saw in chapter 5, the kinds of examples listed above are not rare events: in the United States (in 1980) 32% of all married women employed in expert manager jobs have husbands in working-class jobs, and 46% of men in such expert manager jobs whose wives work have wives employed in working-class jobs. Class heterogeneous families are sufficiently prevalent in contemporary capitalism that these problems of classification cannot be ignored in class analysis.

The central purpose of this chapter is to try to provide a coherent conceptual solution to this problem of identifying the class location of married women in the labor force and then to deploy this solution in an empirical analysis of the relationship between class location and subjective class identity in the United States and Sweden. There are two basic reasons why I think solving this problem of classification is important. First, as a practical matter, if one is doing any kind of research in which the class of individuals is viewed as consequential, one is forced to adopt a solution to this conceptual problem if only by default.

housewives in a distinctive class in relation to their husbands. A housewife of a working-class husband is thus not "in" the working class as such, but in what might be termed "proletarian domestic labor class." One of the best-known defenses of this view is by Christine Delphy (1984: 38-39).

Survey research on political attitudes, for example, frequently examines the relationship between an individual's class and attitudes. Typically, without providing a defense, attributes of the job of the respondent, whether male or female, are used to define class. Like it or not, this implies a commitment to the view that the class of individuals is appropriately measured by their own jobs regardless of the class composition of their households.

More substantively, this problem of classification raises important issues concerning the underlying explanatory logic of class analysis. By virtue of what is a person's class location explanatory of anything? Is it because class identifies a set of micro-experiences on the job which shape subjectivity? Even though they are not dealing with the problem of class and gender, this is essentially the argument of Melvin Kohn (1969) in his numerous studies of the effects of the complexity of work on cognitive functioning and of Michael Burawoy (1985) in his research on consent and conflict within work. If one adopts this job-centered view of the mechanisms through which class matters, then household class composition becomes a relatively secondary problem in class analysis. On the other hand, if one sees the central explanatory power of class as linked to the ways in which class positions shape material interests then household class composition becomes a more salient issue. Resolving this issue of classification, therefore, is bound up with clarifying the mechanisms through which class is explanatory.

In the next section of this chapter, I will briefly review the discussion in the 1980s of the problem of defining the class location of married women. In section 7.2, I will elaborate an alternative approach built on the distinction between direct and mediated class relations briefly discussed in chapter 1. Section 7.3 will then use this distinction to develop a concrete set of predictions about the linkage between class location and class identity in Sweden and the United States. Section 7.4 will present the results of the analysis.

### 7.1 The debate on women and class

These empirical and theoretical issues on the class analysis of women were crystallized in a debate launched in 1983 by John Goldthorpe's controversial essay, "Women and Class Analysis: in Defense of the Conventional View." Goldthorpe endorses the conventional view that the class of women is derived from the class of their husbands:

... the family is the unit of stratification primarily because only certain family members, predominantly males, have, as a result of their labour market participation, what might be termed a directly determined position within the class structure. Other family members, including wives, do not typically have equal opportunity for such participation, and their class position is thus indirectly determined: that is to say, it is "derived" from that of the family "head" . . .

Moreover, the authors in question [traditional class analysts] would not regard their case as being basically affected by the increase in the numbers of married women engaged in paid employment. They would emphasize that although the degree of women's economic dependence on their husbands may in this way be somewhat mitigated, such employment typically forms part of a family strategy, or at all events, takes place within the possibilities and constraints of the class situation of the family as a whole, in which the husband's employment remains the dominant factor. (Goldthorpe 1983: 468-469)

Goldthorpe's paper sparked a lively, if sometimes overly polemical series of exchanges. Goldthorpe's critics (e.g. Heath and Brittain 1984; Stanworth 1984) argued that the class character of the jobs of married women in the labor force has significant effects independently of the class of their husbands, and, as a result, those families within which husbands and wives occupy different job-classes should be treated as having a dual-class character.

Goldthorpe (1984) replied by arguing that treating families as having a cross-class composition risks undermining the coherence of class analysis and subverts the explanatory capacity of the concept of class. Since class conflicts run between families, not through families, if families are treated as lacking a unitary class character, class structure will no longer provide a systematic basis for explaining class conflicts.

Goldthorpe's argument can be broken down into two primary theses:

- 1 *Unitary family-class thesis*: Families pool income as units of consumption. This means that all family members benefit from the income-generating capacity of any member. Consequentially, all family members have the same material - and thus class - interests. As a result, it is in general families, rather than atomized individuals, that are the effective units collectively organized into class formations. Class struggles occur *between* families, not *within* families.
- 2 *Husband's class derivation thesis*: Because of the gender division of labor in the household and male dominance in the society at large, the economic fate of most families depends much more heavily upon the class character of the husband's job than of the wife's. In family strategies of welfare maximization, therefore, in nearly all cases the class-imperatives of the husband's job will overwhelmingly *pre-empt*

strategic considerations involving the wife's job. As a result, the causally effective class of married women (i.e. the class that has any explanatory power) is in general derived from the class location of her husband.

Goldthorpe, of course, does not deny that by and large individuals rather than families fill *jobs* in capitalist economies. What he disputes is the claim that the class structure should be treated as a relational map of the job structure. Instead, classes should be defined as *groups of people who share common material interests*. While it may be the case that the basic material interests of people depend upon their relationship to the system of production, it need not be the case that those interests depend primarily upon their individual position within production (i.e. their "job"). Insofar as families are units of consumption in which incomes from all members are pooled, then all members of the family share the same material interests and thus are in the same class, regardless of their individual jobs. Individual family members would occupy different locations in the class structure only when it is the case that the family ceased to genuinely pool resources and act as a unit of consumption sharing a common fate.

A number of interconnected criticisms can be leveled against these theses. First, while it may be true that all family members benefit from income brought into the household, it does not follow from this that they all share a unitary, undifferentiated interest with respect to such income. To claim that wives and husbands have identical interests with respect to the gross income of the family is somewhat like saying that both workers and capitalists have an interest in maximizing the gross revenues of a business - which is frequently true - and therefore they are in the same class - which is false. Families may pool income, but there is evidence (e.g. Sorensen and McLanahan, 1987) that this does not mean that husbands and wives always share equally in the real consumption derived from that income.

Inequality in the consumption of family income by husbands and wives, of course, does not necessarily mean that married women in the labor force have material interests in their own individual earnings as such, and thus distinct individually based class interests in their jobs. It could be the case that they have *gender* interests in a redistribution of power within the household, but that they still lack any autonomous *class* interest in their own earnings independently of the family income as a whole. There are, however, two reasons why it is plausible to see

married women as having individual class interests linked to their own earnings. First, the high rates of divorce in contemporary capitalist societies means that the jobs of many women in the labor force constitute for them a kind of "shadow class" – the class they would occupy in the face of marital dissolution. Given the relatively high probability of such events, married women have personal class interests in the earnings capacities they derive from their individual jobs. Secondly, there is evidence that the proportion of the family budget brought in by the wife affects her bargaining power within the family. Even if the family pools income, therefore, married women would have some autonomous personal interests in their own earning capacity in their paid jobs.

A second general criticism of Goldthorpe's argument concerns his very narrow understanding of class interests. The unitary family class thesis rests on the claim that since husbands and wives pool income, they have identical interests with respect to overall family earnings capacity and thus identical class interests. The interests that are tied to classes, however, are not simply income-based interests. At least if one adopts a broadly Marxist concept of class, issues of autonomy, the expenditure of effort and domination within work are also systematically linked to class. These kinds of interests are at the heart of what Burawoy (1985) has called the "politics of production" and center much more directly on individuals as job-holders than as members of household units of consumption. Even if married couples share a unitary family consumption class, the potential differences in their job-classes could still generate differences in their class interests.

Third, contrary to Goldthorpe's view, it is not inherently the case that families rather than individuals are mobilized into class struggles. While this may generally be the case, especially in situations where families are class-homogeneous, it is possible to imagine circumstances in which a wife is a union member engaged in union struggles of various sorts and her husband is a manager or petty bourgeois generally opposed to unions. Particularly if class interests are seen as broader than simply interests in income, one can imagine husbands and wives in different job-classes, involved in organizations supporting quite different kinds of class interests. To be sure, it would be extremely rare for husbands and wives to be actively on "opposite sides of the barricade" in a given class struggle – for the husband to be a top manager or employer in a firm in which his wife was on strike. But this does not imply that in other contexts they could not be involved in quite distinct and even opposing kinds of class formations.

Finally, Goldthorpe argues that because the economic fate of the family is *more dependent* upon income from the husband's job than the wife's, the class location of the family should be *exclusively* identified with his job. This assumes that in the strategic choices made within families over labor market participation and job choices there is minimal struggle, negotiation and bargaining, and as a result the interests linked to the husband's job always pre-empt those of the wife's job. Family strategy, in this view, is not some kind of negotiated weighted average of the class-based imperatives linked to each spouse's job, but uniquely determined by the class imperatives of the male breadwinner.

This claim by Goldthorpe is simply asserted on his part, unbacked by either theoretical argument or empirical evidence. Of course, there are many cases where a story of this sort has considerable face validity. There are undoubtedly families in which the husband is in a well-paying managerial or professional job with a systematic career structure while the wife holds part-time flexible work to which she has little commitment. In such situations it might well be the case that whenever there is a trade-off between interests tied to the wife's job and the husband's job, *both* parties agree to adopt a strategy supporting the husband's interests. In such a situation, it may be reasonable, at least as a first approximation, to identify the family-class exclusively with the husband's job. But there is no reason to assume that this particular situation is universal. It is much more plausible to suppose that there is systematic variation across families in such strategic balances of interests and power, and thus that the relative weight of different spouse's job-classes in shaping the class character of the family as a whole is a variable, not a constant.

In 1980, in roughly 10% of all two-earner families in the United States the wife earns 40–49% of the family income and in 25% of all two-earner married couples she contributes 50% or more of the total family income. In Sweden, the figure is even higher: 45% of respondents in two earner families report the wife contributes "about 50%" of the income and 10% report that she brings in 75% or more of the income. Certainly in such families, even from a narrow economic point of view, the family strategies should be affected by the class-character of both spouses' jobs. Furthermore, even when it is the case that in decisive zero-sum trade-off situations, interests derived from the husband's job usually pre-empt those of the wife's, it does not follow from this that in other situations the interests linked to the wife's job are irrelevant and do not shape family income maximization strategies. Even where the wife contributes less than the husband, therefore, the class character of her paid work

could systematically shape family strategies, and thus the class character of the family unit.

If these criticisms are correct, then one is unjustified in simply equating the class location of married working women with the job-class of their husbands. But it also seems unsatisfactory to treat their class as simply based on their own immediate work. Some other conceptual solution to defining their class must be found.

## 7.2 An alternative approach: direct and mediated class locations

Most class concepts view class structures as a set of rooms in a hotel filled by guests. The dwellers may be individuals or families, and they may change rooms from time to time, but the image is of "empty places" being filled by people. There is, however, an alternative general way of understanding class structure: instead of a set of rooms, class structures can be understood as a particular kind of complex network of social relations. What defines this network of relations as a *class* structure is the way it determines the access of people to the basic productive resources of a society and the processes of exploitation, and thus shapes their material interests. A "location," then, is not a "room" in a building, but a node in a network of relations.

In a highly simplified model of the world we can reduce such a network of social relations to a single link between individuals and productive resources constituted by their direct, personal control or ownership of such resources. This is the abstraction characteristic of most Marxist class analysis. But there is no reason to restrict class analysis to such simplifications. The material interests of real, flesh-and-blood individuals are shaped not simply by such direct, personal relations to productive resources, but by a variety of other relations which link them to the system of production. In contemporary capitalist societies these include, above all, relations to other family members (both within a single generation and intergenerationally) and, perhaps, relations to the state. I will refer to these kinds of indirect links between individuals and productive resources as "mediated" relations, in contrast to the "direct" relations embodied in the individual's immediate job and personal ownership of productive resources.

For certain categories of people in contemporary capitalism, location in the class structure is entirely constituted by mediated relations. This is most clearly the case for children. To say that children in a working-class family are "in" the working class is to make a claim about the ways in

which their class interests are shaped by their mediated relations (through their families) to the system of production. Mediated class relations also loom large in understanding the class interests of housewives, the unemployed, pensioners, students. In each of these cases an adequate picture of their class interests cannot be derived simply from examining their direct participation in the relations of production.

The class structure, then, should be understood as consisting of the totality of direct and mediated class relations. This implies that two class structures with identical patterns of direct class relations but differing mediated relations should be considered as different kinds of structures. Consider the following rather extreme contrast for purposes of illustration:

*Class Structure I.* In 66% of all households, both husband and wife are employed in working-class jobs and in 33% of households both husband and wife are co-owners of small businesses employing the workers from the other households.

*Class structure II.* 33% of the households are pure working-class households, 33% have a working-class husband and a small employer wife and 33% have a small employer husband and a working-class wife.

For a strict adherent of the view that class structures are constituted by the individual's direct relation to the means of production, these two class structures are the same: 66% working class, 33% small employers. Also, ironically perhaps, for a strict adherent of Goldthorpe's husband-based family class approach, the two class structures are identical: 66% working class, 33% small employers. If, however, class structures are defined in terms of the *combination* of direct and mediated class locations, then the two structures look quite different: in the first structure, two-thirds of the population is fully proletarianized (i.e. both their direct and mediated class locations are working class); in the second structure, only one-third of the population is fully proletarianized.

Once the distinction between direct and mediated class locations is introduced into the conceptual repertoire of class analysis, it becomes possible to ask the question: what determines the relative weight of these two kinds of linkages to productive resources for particular categories of actors? There may be variations both within and across class structures in the relative importance of these different mechanisms that link people to productive resources. One can imagine a class structure in which mediated relations loom very large for certain people and not for others

in shaping their material interests, and thus their overall location in the class structure.

The problem of married women (and of married men) in the class structure can now be recast in terms of the relative salience of direct and mediated class relations in determining their class interests. Goldthorpe takes a rather extreme position on this question for contemporary industrial capitalist societies: with few exceptions, the mediated class location of married women completely overrides any systematic relevance of their direct class location. Implicit in his argument, however, is the acknowledgment that under appropriate conditions, this would not be the case. If, for example, there was a dramatic erosion of the sexual division of labor in the household and gender differences in power and labor market opportunities, then the direct class location of married women would begin to matter more both for their class location and for that of their husbands.

The theoretical task, then, for understanding the location of women in the class structure, consists of trying to identify causal processes which shape the relative salience of direct and mediated class relations. We will explore this problem in the context of an empirical comparison of the relationship between the class composition of families and class identity in Sweden and the United States.

### 7.3 A strategy for studying the effects of direct and mediated class locations

There are two general empirical strategies that could be adopted to explore these arguments about direct and mediated class locations. If one had adequate longitudinal micro-level household data, one could actually measure the extent to which the material interests of married working women in the United States and in Sweden depend upon their own direct class location or the class location of their husbands, and one could assess the extent to which these direct and mediated class interests impact on individual and collective family strategies. Alternatively, we could consider something which an individual's class location is meant at least partially to explain – such as class consciousness, class identity, participation in class conflict, etc. – and examine the relative “explanatory power” of the direct and mediated class locations of individuals. The only reason for introducing the distinction between direct and mediated class locations is because we believe that an individual's location in a class structure is consequential and that this distinction

provides a better specification of this consequence-producing process. Variations in the relative salience of direct and mediated class locations, therefore, should be reflected in the effects of these two dimensions of class location on whatever it is that class locations ought to explain.

In this chapter I will adopt this second strategy. More specifically, we will examine the relationship between class locations (direct and mediated) and the probability of having a working-class identity, i.e. subjectively considering oneself in the working class. Subjective class identity is not, perhaps, the most subtle indicator of the subjective effects of class location. However, of all dimensions of “class consciousness” it is probably the one most directly reflecting the subjective understanding of one's place in the class structure. Class identity is thus the indicator most closely tied to the theoretical questions of this chapter. The premise of the analysis is that to the extent direct class relations more powerfully determine a person's class location than do mediated relations they will also be more strongly associated with the probability of having a particular class identity.

Underlying the empirical investigation is the simple theoretical model presented in Figure 7.1. Direct and mediated class locations are associated with different causal pathways that affect class identity. Direct class locations affect class identity both because a person's job affects a range of class experiences within work and because direct class locations shape material interests. Mediated class locations, on the other hand, only affect class identity via material interests. The relative weight of direct and mediated class locations on class identity, therefore will depend upon two kinds of factors: (1) the relative weight of direct and mediated class locations on material interests, and (2) the relative salience of production-centered class experiences and consumption-centered class experiences in shaping class identity.

#### *Hypotheses*

Goldthorpe predicts that for both men and women the effect of husband's direct class on class identity will be substantially greater than the effects of the wife's class. Indeed, in the most extreme formulation of his position, controlling for her husband's class, the effects of the wife's own direct class should be zero even on her own class identity – the unitary class of the family is entirely derived from the husband's class and therefore the effects of the wife's job-class on class identity should be negligible.

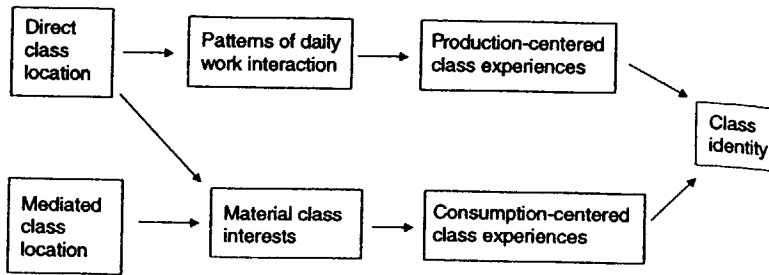


Figure 7.1 A general model of the effects of direct and mediated class locations on class identity.

In contrast, the view that a person's class location should be viewed as a combination of direct and mediated class relations suggests that the relative effects on class identity of the husband's direct class and of the wife's direct class should be variable across families, across economic conditions, and across countries depending upon the relative salience of the individual's direct class location and their mediated location via their family ties. Because of the economic dependency of married women on their husband's jobs, it would generally be expected that family mediated class locations would be more salient for women than for men. But, unlike in Goldthorpe's approach, there is no general expectation that the effects of the wife's direct class will generally be negligible.

We will examine the above expectations for married couples with two earners in the United States and Sweden. There is a variety of reasons why one might expect the relative salience of direct and mediated class locations for married women to vary between Sweden and the United States: greater parity in wages between men and women in Sweden means that Swedish wives are less economically dependent upon their husbands' jobs than American wives, and thus their economic welfare depends less upon their mediated class location; the strong redistributive policies of the state mean that Swedes in general – both men and women – are less dependent than Americans upon their family's earnings for their standard of living; the higher degree of class organization within work in Sweden means that an individual's own job is likely to be more salient in shaping their consciousness. This line of reasoning suggests that the salience for a wife's class identity of her own direct class location relative to her husband's class location should be greater in Sweden than in the United States.

The empirical analysis which follows, therefore, will revolve around the following contrasting hypotheses for predicting the probability of a subjective working-class identification:

#### Goldthorpe hypotheses

- (1.1) *Weak version*: The husband's job-class is significantly more important than the wife's job-class in predicting the identity of both husbands and wives.
- (1.2) *Strong version*: Controlling for husband's job-class, the wife's direct class will not affect either her own or her husband's class identity.

#### Mediated and direct class locations hypotheses

- (2.1) The class identity of married women in the labor force will be affected by both their direct and mediated class locations.
- (2.2) Mediated class locations will have greater salience for the class identity of wives than of husbands.
- (2.3) The direct class location of married women will have greater salience relative to their mediated class location for their class identity in Sweden than in the United States.

## 7.4 Results

Because of limitations in sample size – there are only between 550 and 600 respondents in each country living in dual-earner families – it was impossible to make fine-grained distinctions among types of cross-class families. This has two important consequences for our analyses. First, there were too few people in cross-class families involving small employers and petty bourgeois to include in the study. We will therefore concentrate entirely on families in which both husbands and wives are employees.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, we could not make distinctions among the various categories of the "middle class." For present purposes, therefore, we have simplified our class structure concept into a two-class model: middle-class employees (anyone occupying managerial or supervisory positions or in professional, managerial or technical occupations) and working-class employees (both skilled and nonskilled nonsupervisory employees). Our task, then, is to examine the subjective class identity of

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the results for families with at least one self-employed member, see Wright (1997: 264–265).

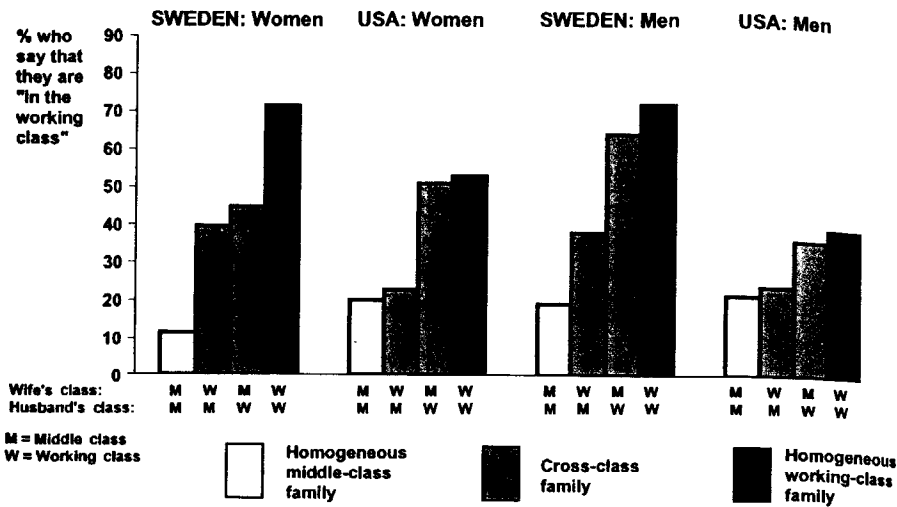


Figure 7.2 Percentage of people who say they are "working class" in dual-earner families with different class compositions.

men and women in four kinds of dual-earner families: homogeneous middle-class families; homogeneous working-class families; families with middle-class husbands and working-class wives; and families with working-class husbands and middle-class wives.

Figure 7.2 indicates the percentage of respondents who subjectively identify with the working class in each of these four types of families in the United States and Sweden. In the United States, among wage-earning families, the class character of the wife's job seems to have no effect on the class identification of either women or men. Roughly 20% of women wage-earners married to men with middle-class jobs and roughly 50% of women wage-earners married to men with working-class jobs subjectively identify with the working class, regardless of the class character of the woman's own job. Among men the pattern is essentially the same, although the percentages are somewhat different: 20% of men in middle-class jobs and just over 35% of men in working-class jobs subjectively identify with the working class, regardless of the class character of their wife's job. Mediated class locations, therefore, have a strong effect on the class identity of women, but none at all on the class identity of men. In short, in the United States, once you know the class position of husbands, your ability to predict class identification for

either husbands or wives does not improve by adding information on the wife's class position.

When we turn to the Swedish data, however, we get a very different picture. In Sweden, for both men and women, there are consistent effects of both husband's and wife's job-class on the subjective class identification of respondents. For Swedish women, about 12% of the respondents in homogeneously middle-class families subjectively identify with the working class compared to nearly 72% in homogeneously working-class families. Women in class-heterogeneous families – women in middle-class jobs married to husbands in working-class jobs or women in working-class jobs married to husbands in middle-class jobs – have an intermediate likelihood of working-class identification, around 40%. A similar, if attenuated, pattern occurs for Swedish men: 19% of the men in homogeneous middle-class families and 72% of the men in homogeneous working-class families subjectively identify with the working class, compared to about 38% of middle-class men married to working-class wives and 64% of working-class men married to middle-class wives. Unlike in the United States, the class identity of both husbands and wives in Sweden is significantly affected by the class character of the wife's job as well as the husband's. None of these results for either country are substantively changed in more complex analyses in which a variety of other variables are included as controls.<sup>3</sup>

#### 7.4 Implications

One simple way of characterizing the results we have been discussing is that the predictions from the "conventional wisdom" of Goldthorpe's model are reasonably accurate for the United States, but not for Sweden: the strong version of the Goldthorpe hypothesis is supported by the US data, while all three hypotheses about mediated and direct class locations are supported by the Swedish data. In the United States, therefore, no predictive power is lost by defining the class location of married women in the labor force by the class of their husbands, whereas in Sweden this is not the case.

How can these different causal structures in Sweden and the United States be explained? There are a range of interpretations which might be pursued. The different patterns we have observed could directly reflect

<sup>3</sup> Formal statistical tests using logistic regressions predicting class identity confirm all of these observations for both the United States and Sweden. See Wright (1997: 268–269) for details.



different cultural conventions for the meaning of class identity for men and women in the two countries. Alternatively, they could be effects of strategies by political parties or unions in treating men and women differently in the forging of collective solidarities. Or, perhaps, the results we have been discussing could be artifacts of measurement problems in one or more of the variables in the analysis. All of these arguments have some plausibility. In the present context, however, I will limit the discussion to two alternative class-centered explanations since these most directly bear on the theoretical agenda of direct and mediated class relations.

The first explanation centers on the causal pathway from class location through class interests to class identity in Figure 7.1. Along this causal path, the less dependent a wife's material welfare is on her husband's job, the less will her class interests be derived from his direct class, and thus the greater the relative weight of her own direct class location. In Sweden, a higher proportion of family income in two-earner families is contributed by wives than in the United States. It is also the case that the welfare and redistributive policies of the Swedish state make the individual economic interests of married women less dependent upon their husbands. In this line of reasoning, then, the greater *relative* impact of a married woman's own job on her class identity in Sweden than in the United States is seen as a consequence of the lower degree of economic dependence of wives on husbands in Sweden. In terms of the model in Figure 7.1, this implies that relative to women in Sweden, for women in the United States, the causal path between direct class location and material interests is much weaker than the path from mediated location and interests.

The second explanation emphasizes that class locations are explanatory not simply because they determine a set of material interests, but because they deeply shape patterns of daily lived experiences, above all within work. Michael Burawoy suggested, in an informal discussion of these results, that a central contrast between Sweden and the United States might be that between a society within which class has its effects primarily through work and a society within which class has its effects primarily through consumption. This general view of the effects of class emphasizes the production-centered causal path in Figure 7.1. In terms of this model, then, the United States would be characterized as a society within which the causal effects of class – both direct and mediated – work primarily through the material interests/consumption path, whereas Sweden is a society within which both causal paths play an important role.

A variety of historical and institutional factors might explain the greater weight of the production-centered class effects in Sweden than in the United States: the nature of the politics of production within the two societies, the forms of articulation between "global politics" and shop floor politics, the degree of collective organization of workers as workers through unions, etc. For example, it might be the case that the specific form of corporatist, centralized unionism in Sweden has the effect of reducing competition between workers in different labor markets (both external and internal). This, in turn, could mean that the daily experiences within work tend to reinforce class-based solidarities, which in turn strengthen working-class identity. But whatever the specific historical and institutional explanation might be, the result is that in Sweden subjective class identification is forged much more systematically through experiences within work than in the United States, whereas in the United States, class identity is formed primarily within consumption and community.

This line of argument, then, suggests that the reason the direct class of married women does not matter very much for predicting class identity in the United States is precisely because in the United States classes are primarily constituted within consumption on the basis of material interests alone, and in terms of consumption a married woman's mediated class location is generally much more causally important than her own direct class. *If* in Sweden classes were similarly constituted primarily in the realm of consumption, then in spite of the weaker economic dependency of women on their husbands, their direct class would still not have a particularly powerful impact on their identity. The greater predictive power of married Swedish women's direct class on their identity comes from the greater salience of class experiences within work on the lives of workers in general in Sweden. In this alternative approach to the issues, then, Goldthorpe's predictions about married women work reasonably well in the United States because the central presupposition of his conceptualization of class – that classes consist of families as units of common material interests/consumption – is much more appropriate for the class structure of the United States than of Sweden.

The data in the present analysis do not lend themselves to a direct assessment of these alternative explanations. To explore properly the issues we would need two other cases: one which was rather like Sweden in the degree of economic autonomy of women, but shared with the United States a consumption-based (family-based) constitution of

classes, and one which shared with Sweden the production-centered salience of class, but had the American pattern of economic dependency. Parallel data for such cases are not available.

There are indirect pieces of evidence in the data, however, which are supportive of the interpretation of US/Sweden differences which emphasizes the workplace causal pathway in Figure 7.1. If the material interest dependency argument was correct, then it would be expected that the *greater the wife's relative economic contribution* to household income, the more her own direct class location should affect her class identity. In statistical tests of this hypothesis, there were no significant interactions of this sort (Wright 1997: 274). Thus, while it is the case that Swedish married women contribute proportionately more to the total family income than do American married women, there is no evidence that the class identity of either American or Swedish women is affected by the variation across households in such contributions.

A second piece of evidence consistent with the emphasis on workplace experience rather than simply material interests concerns the effects of hours worked in the paid labor force on class identity. This variable is very significant for Swedish women, but not for American women, indicating that the more hours a Swedish woman works on the job, the higher the probability of a working-class identification. If we assume that class experiences at the workplace become more salient as one works longer hours, then this result for Swedish women is consistent with the view that what is distinctive in Sweden is the greater salience of workplace-centered class experiences in constituting classes.

These results, it should be stressed, do *not* indicate that it is incorrect to conceptualize classes in terms of common material interests. The consistent explanatory power of women's mediated class locations for their identity in both the United States and Sweden is consistent with the view that class structure is explanatory at least in part because of the material interests it generates. What the data do not support is the view that *differences* in the class-based configurations of material interests for women in the two countries explains the *differences* in the patterns we have observed. The evidence reported here suggests that the reason why direct class relations have greater salience relative to mediated class relations among Swedish women seems largely due to causal processes which intensify the importance of workplace class experiences in the constitution of class in Swedish society in general, rather than mechan-

isms which affect the relative contribution to material interests of direct and mediated relations.

## 7.5 Conclusion

At the core of much Marxian class analysis is the claim that class structure is a fundamental determinant of social conflict and social change. In trying to defend and deepen this intuition, contemporary Marxist theorists have been torn between two theoretical impulses. The first impulse is to keep the concept of class structure as simple as possible, perhaps even accepting a simple polarized vision of the class structure of capitalism, and then to remedy the explanatory deficiencies of such a simple concept by introducing into the analysis a range of other explanatory principles (e.g. divisions within classes or between sectors, the relationship between work and community, the role of the state or ideology in shaping the collective organization of classes, etc.). The second impulse is to gradually increase the complexity of the class structural concept itself in the hope that such complexity will more powerfully capture the explanatory mechanisms embedded in class relations. Basically, these alternative impulses place different bets on how much explanatory work the concept of class structure itself should do: the first strategy takes a minimalist position, seeing class structure as at most shaping broad constraints on action and change; the second takes a maximalist position, seeing class structure as a potent and systematic determinant of individual action and social development.

My work on class has pursued this second strategy. In my theoretical discussions of class structure I have been preoccupied with the problem of the "middle class," with elaborating a class structure concept that would give a coherent and systematic theoretical status to nonproletarian employees in the class structure. This led to the introduction of the concept of "contradictory locations within class relations" and subsequently, the reformulation of that concept in terms of a multidimensional view of exploitation.

In this chapter I have tried to elaborate a second kind of complexity in the problem of class structure, a complexity derived from the fact that people are tied to the class structure not simply through their own personal jobs and property but through a variety of other kinds of social relations. Above all, in the present context, social relations within families constitute an important mechanism through which people are

indirectly linked to the class structure. Since families are units of consumption, the class interests of actors are derived in part from the total material resources controlled by the members of a family and not simply by themselves. Social relations within families thus constitute a crucial source of what I have termed "mediated class relations."

The risk in adding this kind of complexity to class analysis is that the concept of class structure becomes more and more unwieldy. The simple, polarized image of class structure contained in Marx's theoretical writings has enormous polemical power and conceptual clarity. A concept of class structure that posits contradictory class locations and complex combinations of direct and mediated class relations may, in the end, add more confusion than analytical power.

For the moment, however, I think that this is a line of theoretical elaboration that is worth pursuing. In particular, the couplet direct/mediated class relations offers a specific way of linking a Marxist class analysis to an analysis of gender relations without simply subsuming the latter under the former. When the concept of class structure is built exclusively around direct class locations it seems reasonable to treat class relations and gender relations as having a strictly *external* relationship to each other. Gender relations may help to explain how people are *sorted* into class positions, and they may even have specific effects on the overall distribution of class positions (i.e. particular gender patterns may shape the availability of certain kinds of labor power and thus potential for expansion of certain kinds of class positions), but the two kinds of relations – gender and class – do not combine to form a system of internal relations.<sup>4</sup>

When mediated class relations are added to a class structure analysis, this strict dualism of external relations becomes unsatisfactory. Gender mechanisms do not simply sort people into mediated class locations whose properties are definable independently of gender. Rather, gender relations are constitutive of mediated class relations as such. Such mediated class relations through the family are inherently gendered since the gender relations between husbands and wives are the very basis for their respective mediated class locations. The concept of

<sup>4</sup> The contrast between X and Y being linked by *external* relations and *internal* relations is rather similar to the distinction between a liquid in which two elements are in suspension and a liquid in which two elements have combined to form a compound. In the former case, X and Y act independently of each other producing effects; in the latter they constitute a gestalt formed by the internal relations, and some of their effects come from the operation of these internal relations.

mediated class relations, therefore, makes it possible to move away from a view of class and gender in which these two kinds of relations are treated as entirely distinct, separate structures. And yet it does not move all the way towards the view that class and gender constitute a unitary, undifferentiated system. Mediated class relations therefore provides a basis for conceptualizing one form of interaction of class and gender without collapsing the distinction itself.

We began this chapter by asking a question about the class location of husbands and wives in a number of "cross-class" families. The theoretical and empirical analyses of this chapter suggest that this question needs to be re-posed in a somewhat different way. Rather than asking "in what class is person X," we should ask, "what is the location of person X within a network of direct and mediated class relations." While the question is rather inelegant, nevertheless it identifies a critical dimension of complexity of the class structures of contemporary capitalism.