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Characteristics of the Russian Lower Class

Lower socioeconomic strata in Russia have their origins in both the former Soviet lower strata and economic decline of the 1990s. Part of the reason for their persistence is the geographic mismatch between jobs and the labor supply, in addition to lack of education, skills, and social support. The situation cannot be solved by just providing transfer payments.

In an earlier article (Tikhonova 2010) I attempted to show that according to conceptions of the lower class that are traditional in Western sociology, we can say that this social entity exists in Russia. Moreover, regardless of which method defines it, estimates of its size turn out to be similar, in the past few years ranging between 12 percent and 16 percent of the country's economically active

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population. As of the spring of 2009 I estimated it at 14 percent.

In the present article I attempt to demonstrate the reasons why the situation and the fate of the lower class are so strikingly different from the situation of the strata that are better off. First and foremost, it is useful to assess the professional positions of the lower class and its periphery, as well as the assets that they have and are able to offer. What makes this all the more important is that, as shown by a test carried out during the survey to determine the connection between respondents' membership in the lower class and all the variables of the sample set,¹ the group of variables that turned out to be most closely connected was the one that reflects various aspects of *employment* (from its career prospects to its degree of autonomy). Moreover, the highest indicators of statistical significance with membership in the lower class were exhibited by self-assessments of the respondents' chances of finding self-realization in their profession, the prestige of their work, its meaningful content, and so on. Also closely connected to membership in the lower class were groups of variables such as the following:

- characteristics linked to *differences in the level of education, qualification, and cultural capital* (specifically education level, skills in information technologies, self-assessments as to the accessibility of a necessary education, the education of their parents, the place of their primary socialization, etc.);
- self-assessments of their social status*;
- characteristics of *family situation* (types of households, self-assessments of family life, causes of family conflicts, etc.) and *social networks* (a sense of a lack of support from friends and relatives, the prevalence of particular kinds of support from networks, self-assessments of opportunities to interact with friends, the presence of friends in everyday interaction, the level of friends' education, the number of poor households among close associates, etc.);
- the characteristics of their *social and psychological state* (the prevalence of various types of negative emotions such as fear, helplessness, the feeling that it is not possible to go on living that way, and so on) and self-assessments of their *state of health*;
- a number of characteristics of their *standard of living and*

way of life (household and personal possessions, lack of access to medical assistance, accumulated small debts, lack of significant achievements in life in recent years, and so on);

—the degree of *the influence of the economic crisis*.

Thus, the most typical features of the lower class in Russia correspond to those associated in the literature with characteristic traits of the lower class in developed countries. In consideration of this, I will begin with an analysis of characteristics of the lower class in Russia from the standpoint of the *professional statuses* of its members, a key issue in understanding their positions in the labor market and in the system of production relations as a whole. Then I will examine various aspects of their employment.

As can be seen from Table 1, *the professional portrait of the lower class in Russia is very close to its traditional portrait in societies with a developed market economy: basically, it consists of medium-qualified and nonqualified blue-collar workers, as well as rank-and-file workers in trade and consumer services* (salesclerks, counter clerks in drycleaning establishments, and so on). The chief differences between the lower class per se and its periphery (even though this does not change the overall picture of the similarity of the occupational portrait of these groups) are seen in a relatively larger percentage of white-collar workers (specialists and rank-and-file office personnel) and a relatively smaller percentage of nonqualified blue-collar workers in the periphery. In addition, if we look at particular professional groups, the likelihood of ending up among the lower class is over 50 percent only for unemployed people (70 percent), or among the lower class or its periphery in the case of nonqualified blue-collar workers and rank-and-file workers in trade and consumer services (see Figure 1); this is also typical of the lower class in any country. A major portion of entrepreneurs, the self-employed, managers on all levels, specialists (both civilian and military), and rank-and-file office personnel (white-collar employees) do not end up in the lower class or its periphery. And, moreover, this principle is also at work in each of the social and professional groups.

From this picture of the social and professional composition of the lower class it is clear that in Russia, people in this group are for

Table 1

The Social and Occupational Composition of the Lower Class and Its Periphery (%)

Socio-occupational groups	Lower class	Periphery of lower class	Well-off strata*
Representatives of mental labor	25	36	55
Entrepreneurs and self-employed**	7	4	3
Managers on all levels	0	3	7
Specialists (including military officers)	9	15	31
Office personnel	9	14	14
Blue-collar workers	71	63	45
Rank-and-file worker in trade or consumer services	15	19	10
Blue-collar worker, grade 5 or above	13	13	17
Blue-collar worker, grade 3 and 4	25	23	15
Blue-collar worker, grade 1 and 2 or no grade	18	8	3
Nonworking people	4	1	0

*Here I have not divided relatively well-off strata into classes. They consisted of representatives of the working class and the middle class.

**Both in the lower class and in its periphery it was exclusively self-employed people who ended up in that professional group, whereas in well-off strata this group included some entrepreneurs who had hired their own workers.

the most part in the secondary labor market, whose percentage in the total working population of our country has risen substantially in the past few decades. For example, from 2000 to 2008 alone, according to data of the Federal Service of State Statistics of the Russian Federation, the percentage of workers in services, housing and utilities, and trade among the employed population went up from 12.2 percent to 14.4 percent (see www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b09_11/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d01/06-04.htm). It is in trade, where three-quarters of this group are employed, that the percentage of workplaces of the secondary labor market is very high. This has been one consequence of the deindustrialization of the Russian economy: the total percentage of qualified blue-collar workers of

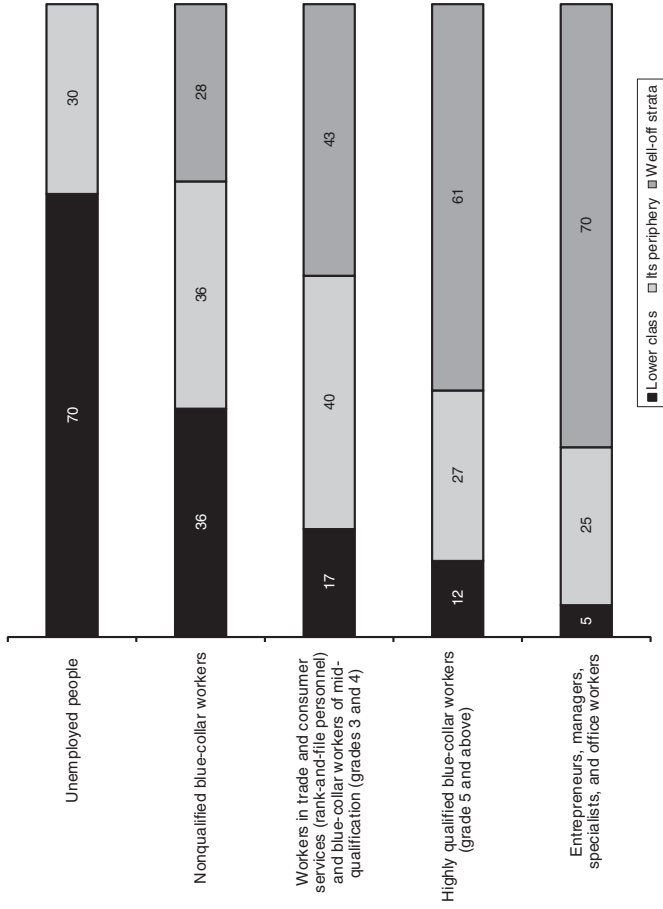


Figure 1. The Likelihood That Representatives of the Various Professional Statuses Will End Up in the Composition of the Lower Class or Its Periphery (%). (Here and above the statistical test was carried out by means of the figures of the χ -square and the method of standard deviations. To serve as the criterion of statistical significance of the established relation, use was made of a figure of a χ -square of no more than 0.001.)

enterprises of all sectors, not counting workers in the sphere of trade, housing and utility services, and the sphere of services, went down from 36 percent to 31 percent of all employed people from 2000 through 2008, see www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b09_11/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d01/06-04.htm. The first decade in the new century has also seen a rapid process—closely linked to the structural restructuring of the economy—of declining employment in large and medium-sized enterprises and a rising number of workers employed in small enterprises of all types, employment that is much more likely to be classified as characteristic of the secondary labor market (Gimpel'son and Kapeliushnikov 2005, pp. 15–16). When we consider, moreover, that all of these processes were going on the most rapidly during the 1990s rather than in the new century, it is clear that the scale of deindustrialization as the main cause of the emergence of a mass *new lower class* in the most highly developed countries in the 1970s and 1980s was of even greater magnitude in Russia than was characteristic of the countries of the West thirty to forty years previously.

We see that *in the past two decades serious changes have taken place in the sphere of employment in Russia, which have brought about on a mass scale the emergence of structural positions that are characteristic of the lower class. At the same time, the social differentiation of society has drastically deepened, and mass strata of the poor have come into being, whose depth of poverty is not to be compared with the situation during the Soviet era. Attempts to solve the problem of poverty, not via changes in the structure of the economy and regulation of the labor market but, rather, by providing "targeted assistance to the very poor," could not in any way have a serious effect on the development of the negative tendencies that became established in the country's social and economic development. The result has been the rise of the objective prerequisites to the formation of a mass lower class in Russia.*

At the present time, the structural positions characteristic of the lower class and its periphery are concentrated first and foremost *in the enterprises of the nonstate sector* that came into being specifically during the era of the reforms (see Table 2). In this regard it is also reasonable to say that *the lower class in Russia is taking on the*

Table 2

Localization of the Structural Positions of the Lower Class and Its Periphery (%)

Socio-occupational groups	Periphery of		
	Lower class	lower class	Well-off strata
<i>Type of enterprise ownership:</i>			
State-owned	29	32	47
Privatized	16	15	20
Newly created private enterprise (including private farmers)	42	40	28
Other	13	13	5
<i>Place of residence:</i>			
Cities with a population of over a million people	12	18	29
Cities with a population of 250,000 to a million	11	16	18
Cities with a population of less than 250,000	27	28	28
Villages and urban-type settlements	50	38	25

features of the classic lower class, with its characteristic employment in the nonstate sector rather than in large enterprises.

As can be seen from Table 2, *the lower class in Russia, as in developed countries, owing to the characteristics of its spatial localization, has less access to large local labor markets with a more attractive job structure.* In Russia, this is linked to the fact that members of the lower class live primarily in small towns and villages, while a major portion of jobs that do not require high qualifications are concentrated in large cities. Moreover, it is increasingly recognized by some representatives of the lower class themselves that their social and economic position is linked to their place of residence. It is no accident that the percentage of those who are satisfied with the place they live is one and a half times lower than in well-off strata of the economically active population, while the percentage of those who are not satisfied is one and a half times higher.

However—and this is very important—despite the concentration

of the lower class primarily in relatively small communities, today almost a quarter of this group is concentrated in megalopolises and large cities. And 7–9 percent of the inhabitants of different types of medium-sized and large cities (a population of 250,000 or more) are classified as belonging to the lower class. This means that, considering the history of the formation of the underclass in large cities of other countries, *in the near future Russia may confront the problem of the formation of a mass lower class and also the emergence of the typical underclass of large cities.*

In small towns and, especially, villages, the percentage of the lower class and its periphery comprises at least half the population. This can hardly fail to lead to a mass lumpenization and marginalization of this population. Considering that about half of rural inhabitants are classified as belonging to the deprived strata of the population,² *the likelihood is very high that “small-town Russia” will become ghettoized, turning it into a place that fosters the formation of psychological prototypes and a subculture characteristic of the underclass in any country.* But Russia, in the course of market reforms, has again embarked on its own path. Consequences of the negative tendencies of deepening social differentiation, against the background of deindustrialization, will not be confined to the emergence of a mass lower class in large cities. Clearly, there will be an even more rapid ghettoization of a substantial portion of small-town Russia, with the simultaneous emergence of a mass underclass localized in its space.

Thus, *in today’s Russia the representatives of the lower class and its periphery consist, for the most part, of representatives of occupational statuses that are typical of the “classic” lower class, characterized by a spatial settlement model that does not coincide with the localization points of jobs calling for the extensive use of relatively low-quality manpower.* Also discernible are other characteristics of occupational positions characteristic of the “classic” lower class. Their access to power, career prospects, the meaningful content and autonomy of their work, not to mention the amount of earnings, all indicate that these are the “lower orders” of the working population of Russia (see Table 3).

As we see in Table 3, the ratio of those who rate their production

Table 3

Characteristics of the Occupational Positions of the Lower Class and Its Periphery (%)

Socio-occupational groups	Lower class	Periphery of lower class	Well-off strata
<i>Self-assessment of the general situation on the job:*</i>			
—good	8	14	25
—bad	39	26	13
Do not like the job's lack of prospects	28	23	14
Do not like the low level of pay	66	55	39
<i>Have access to authority at work:</i>			
—are able to influence decision making in the whole enterprise	2	5	8
—are able to influence decision making within their own subunit	13	25	39
—practically nothing depends on their opinions at work	76	67	52
—do not have a job, or did not answer	9	3	1
<i>Degree of autonomy of the work:</i>			
—make independent decisions on how to change the pace of work	18	26	35
—make independent decisions on when to go on leave	9	18	25
—make independent decisions on when to leave work	6	11	20
Like the fact that the job gives the opportunity to show initiative	8	20	26
<i>Self-assessment of the possibility of finding self-realization in the profession:</i>			
—good	7	13	30
—poor	50	28	14

*The question included the answer “satisfactory,” which is not represented in the table; thus the sum total of the answers is less than 100 percent.

situation as good in the lower class and in better-off strata stands at 1:3, while those that rate it as poor stands at 3:1, the direct opposite. It is possible to understand this difference by looking at how those in the lower class and in well-off strata rate various aspects of production activity. For example, almost half of well-off groups have some *access to authority*, while only 15 percent of the lower class do (although in accordance with Russia's established tradition of the distribution of competencies it is much less prevalent among working Russians than in other countries of Western Europe such as Great Britain and Germany [Anikin 2009]). Threefold gaps also characterize the *autonomy of work* of these social groups. To a large extent, as well, the low indicators of the role that work plays in self-realization among the lower class are linked to their access to authority and the degree of autonomy of their work.

We should mention the inadequate *social protectedness* of the lower class, directly linked to the positions held in the system of production relations. By the spring of 2009, for example, people in this group were twice as likely as those in well-off strata to experience delays in getting paid, and two and a half times less likely to receive various supplementary social benefits such as housing, transportation, medical assistance, and food. Moreover, *the economic crisis of 2008 and 2009 had a larger impact on the production positions specifically of the lower class*: the opportunity to earn money worsened for 81 percent, compared to only 50 percent of the well-off strata. This served as one more evidence of the weak position of the lower class in the labor market.

Along with employment characteristics, a second feature of this class position is their low level of *resource assets*, in particular *the low quality of their human capital, including their cultural assets*. This is no accident: *to a large extent the specific character of their positions in the labor market is specifically predetermined by the fact that they are only able to offer the labor market their own "ordinary ability to do physical work"* (see Figure 2).

As can be seen from Figure 2, in the well-off strata of the population the overwhelming majority of working people (82 percent) have a special professional education; almost half of these have a higher education. In the periphery of the lower class, almost half

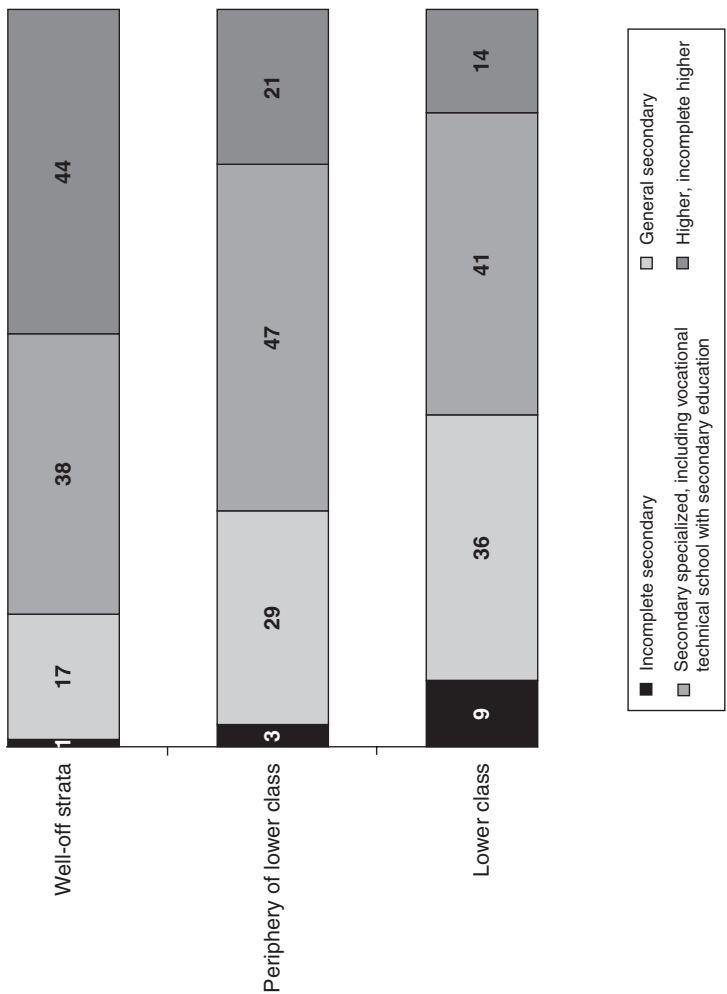


Figure 2. Level of Education of the Lower Class and Its Periphery (%)

do not have any kind of special professional education and only 21 percent have a higher education.

For representatives of these two groups, *access to an education* is not only objectively different but it is also perceived subjectively as one of the most significant social inequalities: the lower class rates its opportunities to obtain necessary education and skills as poor, 2.5 times more often than the well-off strata does (55 percent compared to 22 percent). A twofold to fourfold gap persists in each of the subgroups that are identical in level of education. For example, among members of the lower class and well-off strata of the population who have a secondary general education, the respective percentages of those who rate their chances of acquiring the necessary education and skills are 24 percent and 56 percent.

The combination of a very poor basic education and a lack of opportunities to catch up on the necessary knowledge, not only their educational level but also the set of *skills* in demand in the labor market also are substantially differentiated. For example, 73 percent of the lower class compared to only 35 percent of well-off strata do not know how to use a computer; 82 percent and 45 percent, respectively, do not know how to use the Internet.

The probability of ending up in structural positions characteristic of the lower class is also affected by the quality of cultural capital, which constitutes a very important component of assets that workers possess and are able to offer to the labor market. One of the most important characteristics of an individual's *cultural capital* is the environment where primary socialization took place, in particular the level of education of the adults in his family. As can be seen from Table 4, *in order to belong to the well-off strata of the population in today's Russia it is essential to come from a family in which the father³ had an education at least as high as a secondary specialized education.*

Looking at the situation from the reverse angle, rating the probability that a person will end up in one of the two strata depending on the father's education level, it turns out that for people whose father had no higher than a *general secondary education* the likelihood of ending up in the lower class or its periphery is 52 percent. For those whose father had a *secondary specialized education*, the likelihood

Table 4

Relation Between the Standard of Living of Representatives of the Different Social Strata and the Level of Education of Their Parents (as a % of respondents who answered the question about the education of their parents)

Level of parents' education	Lower class	Periphery of lower class	Well-off strata
<i>Father's education:</i>			
No higher than general secondary	68	56	42
Secondary specialized	25	32	37
Higher	7	12	21
<i>Mother's education:</i>			
No higher than general secondary	62	55	42
Secondary specialized	28	32	37
Higher	10	13	21
<i>Both parents' education:</i>			
No higher than general secondary	55	49	34
Secondary specialized	31	33	37
Higher or incomplete higher education of one of the parents	14	18	29

is less than 50 percent. And for those whose father (or both parents) had at least an *incomplete higher education*, the probability is less than one-third. In addition, in regard to the assimilation of a particular type of culture (urban or rural), the lower class also exhibits definite differences in the process of its primary socialization. Almost two-thirds have undergone primary socialization in villages or in urban-type settlements, while only 12 percent have done so in big cities (see Figure 3).

Moreover, the high probability of ending up in the lower class or its periphery also persists in cases where an individual who has undergone socialization in a rural area moves to the city: among the ones who went through their primary socialization in rural areas and urban-type settlements but then migrated to the city, the percentage of those who ended up in the lower class runs as high as 16 percent, compared to 5 percent among urban inhabitants who went through their socialization under the conditions of the

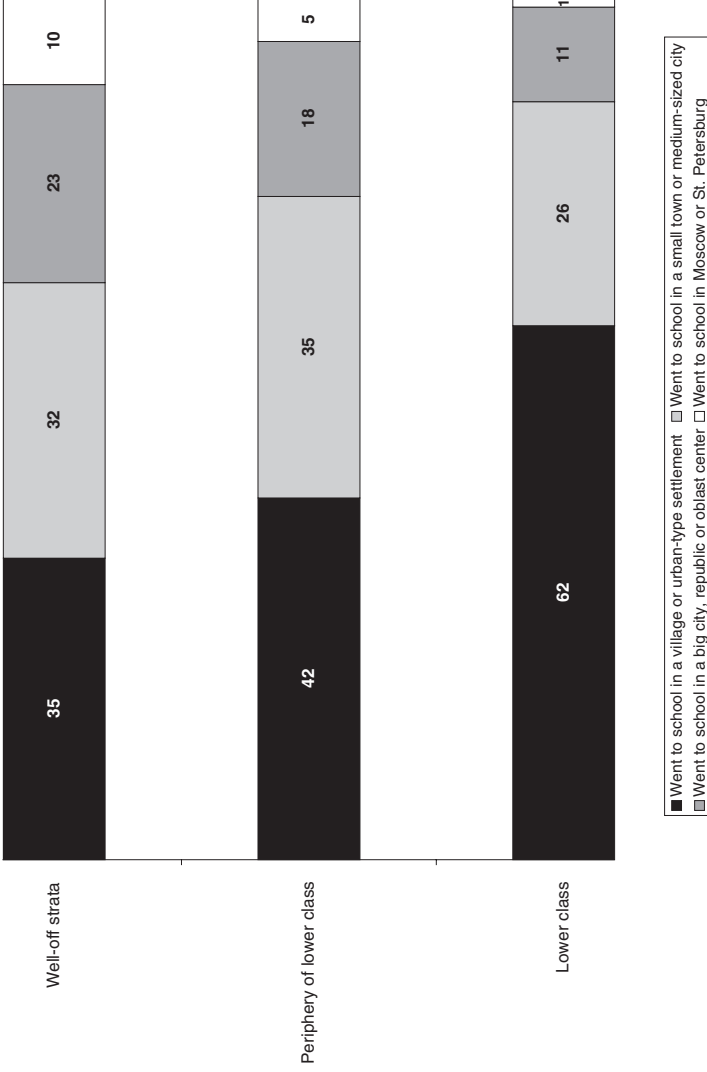


Figure 3. Place of Primary Socialization of Representatives of the Lower Class and Its Periphery (%)

urban culture. It seems obvious that this is linked to the fact that the human and cultural capital of a major portion of those from rural areas is distinctly different from that of most urban dwellers who were born in cities. Accordingly, they are only able to aspire to jobs of lower quality, even in labor markets that are relatively well developed and quite favorable in the context of Russia as a whole. Moreover, migration into larger population centers where there are attractive jobs of various types makes economic sense primarily for those who, even though they have gone through their primary socialization in a rural area, grew up in families of the rural intelligentsia or local managers (Lezhnina 2008).

And so, in today's Russia as a whole we find confirmation of P. Bourdieu's conception of the role played by cultural capital in the reproduction of classes and the retention of privileged class positions as a function of the possession of specifically this kind of capital. At the same time, the presence of quite a large number of factors that do not relate to class (place of residence, health, composition of the household, personal qualities, including propensity for alcoholism, and so on), which have a substantial influence on an individual's employment and standard of living in today's Russia, means that by no means all people from educated families end up among well-off strata. As a result, today in Russia about one of every seven representatives of the lower class has a higher education, and the percentage of those who come from educated families in the lower class is even higher.

Now let us examine whether these members of the lower class feel that they belong to that class. Let me note at the outset that representatives of the lower class rate their present status as very low. Almost two-thirds classify themselves as belonging to lower-status positions in society (see Figure 4). Among those who live in cities, where social inequality is relatively deeper, this tendency can be discerned even more clearly. Hence, *the lower class that has been singled out encompasses all social outsiders not only objectively but also in terms of the way its representatives rate themselves.* Moreover, this tendency is at work both on an all-Russian scale and in local communities.

The crucial question, however, is whether these are the "new"

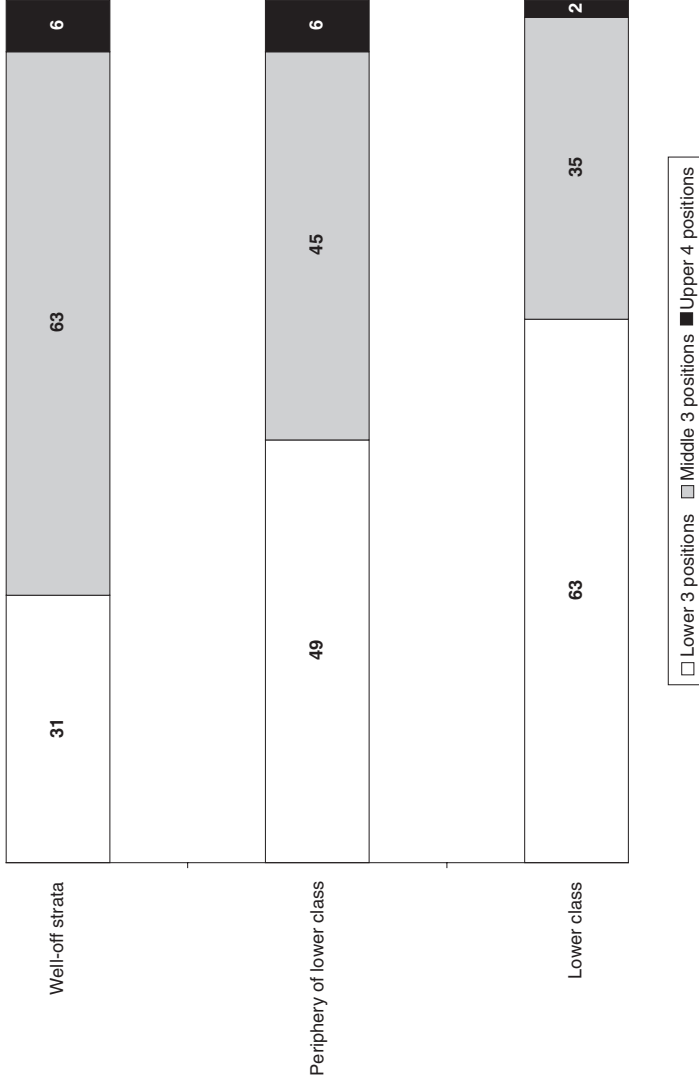


Figure 4. Self-Assessment of Social Status on a 10-Point Scale by the Lower Class and Its Periphery (%)

or the “traditional” lower orders of Russian society. It has been shown by existing empirical data that *on the basis of their origin most of its members come from the community of the “old poor” of the Soviet era*. The “new poor” who came into being on a mass scale in the 1990s as a result of the economic reforms, [and] those with professional statuses that were uncharacteristic of the lower class during the period of economic growth in the past few years generally adapted to the new realities. People who remained among the deprived population, however, were primarily those whose occupational status and assets under market conditions are characteristic specifically of the lower class.

Evidence that the portrait of the lower class in today’s Russia is defined not by the “new poor” but by the “old poor” is provided not only by the data cited above concerning the human capital and professional status of most of its representatives, but also by the assessments by most members of their gains or losses due to the reforms in Russia starting in 1992. Less than one-third of the lower class thinks it came out as losers due to the reforms. Thus, *about two-thirds belonged to the lower strata of society in the Soviet era as well*.

However, the foregoing characterizes the objective place of the lower class in society, whereas in the sociological literature, particular behavioral and cultural stereotypes are also generally associated with the lower class and, especially, the underclass. To what extent are these inherent to the lower class in Russia, and, accordingly, what can be said about how far the process of its formation as a special social entity has gone?

I will start with a number of its *cultural characteristics*, first and foremost those oriented toward the necessity of undertaking active efforts to take care of themselves. This position is solidly linked to the culture of poverty. Among the lower class in Russia, a relatively higher percentage (compared to well-off strata of the population) list assistance from relatives, neighbors, and others as a main source of income. At the same time, in the structure of income sources it is relatively rare for people in this group to hold down more than one job. Surprisingly, only 37 percent of the lower class who live in villages and urban-type settlements have an individual farm plot.

Moreover, 21 percent do not do anything to improve their material condition, although they feel the need to improve it.

All these factors, of course, do not constitute evidence that a culture of poverty has been formed in Russia. Given the present level of welfare benefits in this country, a classic “culture of poverty” cannot be formed. Nonetheless, it is clear that *those in the lower class have less inclination toward independent action to provide sources of income that would involve their own work efforts.*

Evidence of definite cultural differences in this group is provided by members’ life stance: a motivation to get ahead and have a career is much less prevalent (see Table 5). In part, this is a compensatory reaction to a reality in which there is a very low likelihood of getting work with desirable characteristics (see Table 5). However, this fact alone cannot completely account for the difference in the level of motives to get ahead in the lower class and well-off strata.

Now let us look at *family situation and social networks*. The relatively lower significance of these spheres to those in the lower class evidently reflects the lower probability that members will have a happy family, bring up good children, and have reliable friends (see Table 6). It is no accident that, in rating relations in their own families, only 43 percent of this group who are officially married, compared to 63 percent in the well-off strata, characterized marital relations as good.

Assessments of relations in the family also present a deplorable picture (see Figure 5). This is not surprising, considering that over half of lower-class families cite material difficulties among the three chief causes of conflicts (in well-off strata under one-third cite this reason). A second cause of conflicts characteristic of the lower class (17 percent, compared to 10 percent in well-off strata) is drunkenness or narcotics abuse on the part of one family member.

One finds a smaller percentage of officially registered marriages in the lower class (46 percent) than among well-off strata (69 percent). The former group also is characterized by a higher percentage of divorced people and those who never have been married, as well as widowed people. The percentage of people in an unregistered marriage is similar in both groups, 8–9 percent.

Regarding *social networks* in the lower class, they are less well

Table 5

Characteristics of the Attitudes of the Lower Class and Its Periphery in the Sphere of Work (%)

Social groups	Lower class	Periphery of lower class	Well-off strata
<i>Possession of a prestigious job:</i>			
—already have one	6	9	30
—do not have one yet but think it is within their powers	23	26	24
—want to have one but think they will not be able to	54	52	37
—did not even plan to have one	17	13	8
<i>The opportunity to create a career:</i>			
—have already done so	1	3	11
—have not yet done so but think it is within their powers	15	24	31
—would like to but think they will not be able to	39	26	20
—did not even plan to do so	54	47	38
<i>Possession of an interesting job:</i>			
—already have one	19	22	47
—do not yet have one but think it is within their powers	31	38	29
—would like to get one but do not think they will be able to	42	35	21
—did not even plan to have one	8	5	3

developed and of poorer quality. Most representatives of the lower class do not have a solid sense of reliable support from friends, relatives, and colleagues, no feeling that such people will come to their aid if needed. In any case, 60 percent each of members of the lower class and its periphery (compared to 48 percent in well-off strata) felt that way at least occasionally, while 16 percent among the lower class (compared to only 7 percent in well-off strata) never had that feeling.

This situation may be conditioned by the circle of association of the lower class, for the most part or to a significant degree consisting of poor strata, who might be happy to render substantial support if they were able to do so. Only one out of every five members of

Table 6

Characteristics of the Attitudes of the Lower Class and Its Periphery in the Sphere of Family and Association with Friends (%)

Social groups	Lower class	Periphery of lower class	Well-off strata
<i>Have a happy family:</i>			
—already have one	45	53	68
—do not have one yet but think it is within their powers	26	28	23
—would like to have one but think they will not be able to	24	16	8
—did not even plan to have one	5	3	1
<i>Bring up good children:</i>			
—have already done so	36	37	47
—have not yet done so but think it is within their powers	44	52	46
—would like to but think that they will not be able to	15	8	5
—did not even plan to do so	5	3	2
<i>Have reliable friends:</i>			
—already have them	65	68	78
—do not yet have them but think it is within their powers	17	21	15
—would like to have them but think they will not be able to	12	7	5
—did not even plan to have them	6	4	2

the lower class, according to their own estimate, have poor people in their circle. And there is some likelihood that the deplorable social capital of the lower class is due to the fact that a social network requires reciprocity, though not necessarily equivalence, in the exchange of goods and services, but the lower class does not have much to offer other participants. Finally, the ineffectiveness of social networks in the lower class may be linked to the fact that they simply do not have enough money to maintain their networks. After all, holding on to resource networks involves the expenses needed to meet with members of these networks, give them gifts on various occasions, and so on. It is no accident that members of the lower class give a relatively low rating to their opportunities

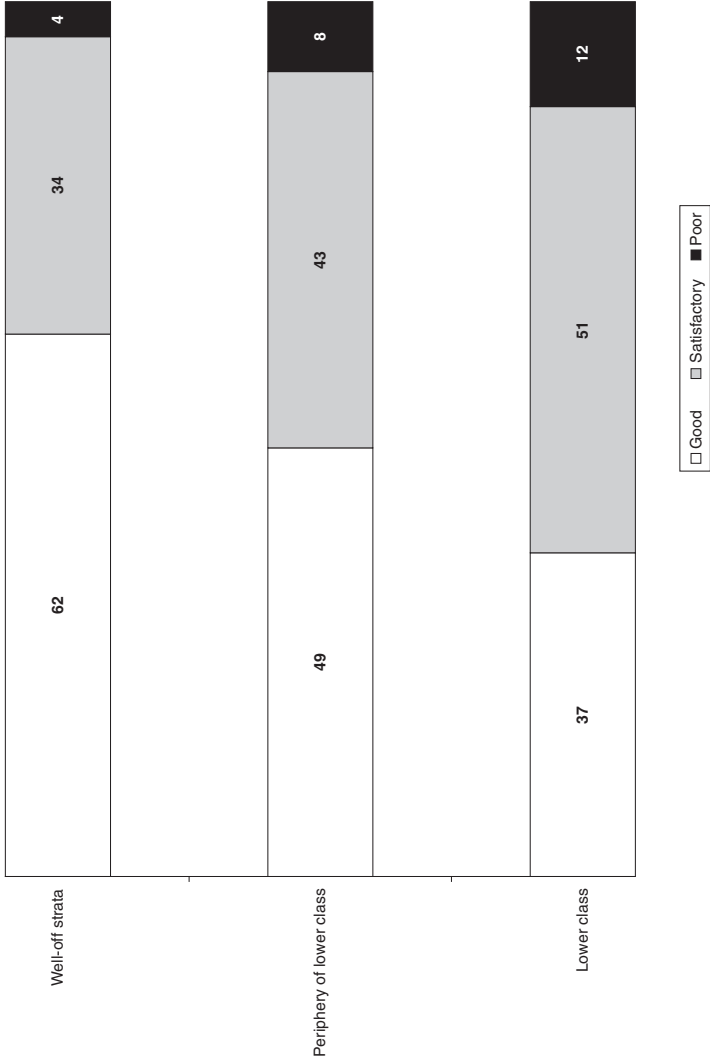


Figure 5. Self-Assessment of Relations in the Family by the Lower Class and Its Periphery (%)

to interact with friends (see Figure 6). Nonetheless, whatever accounts for the situation with respect to social capital (most likely, all the listed factors are at work), there can be no doubt that *the social resources of its members are not able to provide them with any substantial assistance to improve their situation*, like the social resources of members of the lower class in developed countries.

The limited size of the present article does not allow me to dwell on other characteristics of the lower class related to members' *social psychology, standard of living and way of life*, and so on. As in the life attitudes, family situation, and social networks discussed above, the sense of social well-being and standard of living shows that the place of this stratum in the Russian social structure is still being formed. It would not be right to say that these differences are so significant that the lower class has already become a homogeneous, collective entity. In part this is linked to the fact that its composition includes the "new lower class," and that from 2000 to 2008 its condition improved somewhat. As noted earlier, under the conditions of "commuter" employment, the new lower class is characterized by the restoration of behavioral patterns and life attitudes that are not characteristic of the traditional lower class.

In this context a huge role in the accelerating formation of a lower class in Russia may be played by the economic crisis. The crisis has struck the heaviest blow specifically against this group, which occupies the most vulnerable positions in the labor market and has no safety margin in the form of savings, possessions that can be sold, and so on. A total of 48 percent (compared to 18 percent of well-off strata) experienced a decline in their nutrition, while 78 percent (compared to 46 percent) have less ability to acquire needed clothing and footwear, and so on. At the same time, members have fewer opportunities to earn money. In the aggregate, this will inevitably lead to entrenchment of the most negative tendencies in the consciousness and behavior of members of the lower class.

* * *

The serious changes of the past two decades in both the employment sphere (deindustrialization and the rise of the secondary labor market) and social differentiation (its drastic deepening and

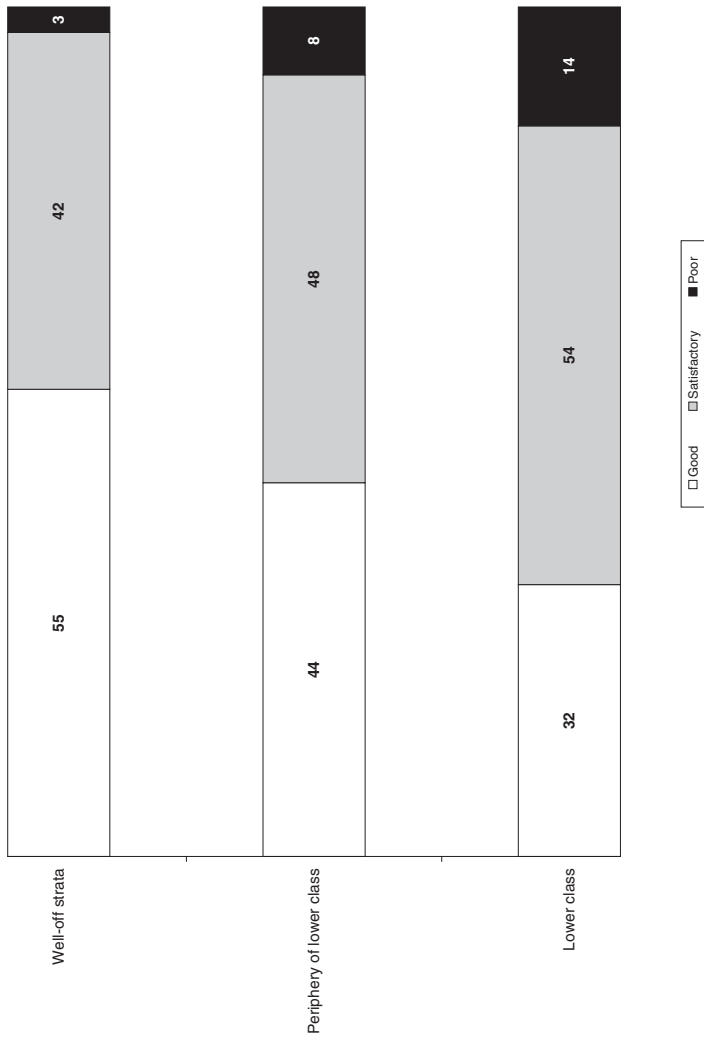


Figure 6. Self-Assessment of Opportunities to Associate with Friends by the Lower Class and Its Periphery (%)

the rapid increase in numbers of the poor, as well as the numbers of low-income poor, have resulted in the emergence of structural positions characteristic of the lower class, which did not exist during the Soviet era. The overwhelming majority of people in these positions have been in population groups with the lowest resources, including their level of education and qualifications, cultural capital, social networks, and economic resources. This has brought it about that the major portion of today's lower class has come out of the "poor," the "Soviet" poor. However, the composition of the lower class includes a substantial percentage of new members, whose emergence has been conditioned by negative tendencies in social and economic development in the past two decades.

The internal heterogeneity of the lower class is linked not only to a composition of both "old" and "new" poor. The formation process of the lower class is itself not complete. The heterogeneous character of the lower class is manifested not only in the depths of its poverty but also in the qualitative characteristics of their lives, worldviews, and behavior. Periods of economic growth have led to some improvement for certain members, but have not had a serious influence on the size of the lower class or the general vector of its evolution. The development of crisis tendencies in the economy has exacerbated the condition of this portion of the population, enabling us to speak of the inevitability of the rapid completion of its formation and its increasing separation from the rest of the population.

At the present time, the professional portrait of the lower class in Russia is very similar to its traditional portrait in societies with well-developed market economies: for the most part it consists of medium-qualified and nonqualified blue-collar workers, as well as rank-and-file workers in trade and consumer services. At the same time, in regard to its professional positions, the lower class is characterized by explicit differences from the working class and the middle class, reflecting its place in the system of production relations as a whole and in the labor market in particular. It also differs notably from them in terms of their sense of their own status in society. With respect to all these positions, the periphery of the lower class occupies intermediate positions, while it gravitates more

toward the lower class and is similar to it with respect to most of the key characteristics that have been noted.

Attempts to solve the problem of poverty not by methods of a social and economic policy that requires changes in the structure of the economy and the labor market but, instead, by “targeted assistance to the very poor” will not have a serious influence on the development of negative tendencies. Among these, a special danger is that the emergence of a mass lower class, including an underclass in large cities, will accompany the accelerated formation (based in many small communities) of a lower class that makes up a substantial percentage of their population, as well as the ghettoization of a substantial part of “small-town Russia,” with the widespread type of culture characteristic of the underclass. At present, however, the problem that is more urgent is that of the lower class rather than the underclass, since the established models of employment and social support from the state helps block the formation of an underclass in the traditional sense.

Notes

1. The test was carried out by means of a variation of the method of linear regression in the CHAID program (known as the tree-classification method). Later, for the relations that have demonstrated the highest statistical significance, a supplementary test was conducted by means of the Pearson coefficient or the Spearman coefficient. The specific coefficient was selected on the basis of the character of the questions.

2. At the same time, as shown by world experience, if the level of poverty in some area is 40 percent or more (called concentrated poverty), a rapid “growth” of the underclass gets started (Ricketts and Mincy 1990).

3. In this connection it is worthwhile to note that the indicators of the statistical significance of membership in some social group and the characteristics of the father’s education were the highest indicators of all those linked to the parents’ education. This seems strange at first glance: in theories of stratification it is commonly thought that it is the mother’s education that makes it possible to measure more accurately a person’s membership in some social stratum during the period of primary socialization. In Russia, however, the situation is the reverse: in this country it is not common to stint on the education of girls, and many jobs involving physical labor offer a high level of pay. In our country, for this reason, households that are marginal in composition are quite prevalent, households in which the woman has a higher education (and has a job in the budget-funded sphere as a rule), while the man is employed in highly paid physical labor (Iudina 2008). If under these conditions the father of the

respondent had a higher education, then the household in which the primary socialization of the respondent took place was solidly included among the educated strata. In other words, such a household definitely provided a better intergenerational transmission of the life attitudes and behavioral practices that are characteristic of these strata.

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