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CLASS DIFFERENTIATION OF HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURES

Household expenditures and consumption patterns have always been of interest to sociologists. Originally, sociologists were interested in the proportion of the household income dedicated to items such as food, rent, and clothing in order to assess the material well-being of individuals (Hexter 1916). These studies were conducted by sociologists who focused on the effects of societal change produced by industrialization and urbanization. At the beginning of the past century, when many of these early studies were conducted, it had become obvious that aspirations and opportunities, as well as resulting living conditions, were increasingly differentiated according to individuals' social class. Almost 100 years later, after the fall of communism, the experience of a transition to a free market may not be as dramatic as the transition experienced at early stages of industrialization and urbanization, but the degree to which differentiation by social class in consumption patterns has occurred remains a pertinent question.

Sociologists have already begun to examine the increasing differentiation of consumption patterns among Polish households since the transition to a free market and the emergence of a consumer society (Beskid 1999; Milic-Czerniak 1998; Morris 1998; Palaszewska-Reindel 1998; Sikorska 1998; Beskid 1992). It has been widely acknowledged that, in post-communist Poland, as in developed market economies, what is a necessity for some is a luxury for others. Moreover, the distinction between "necessary goods" and "luxury goods" changes over time. The preferences for both types of goods are determined by factors on the individual level (e.g., disposable income)

and on the societal level (e.g., gross national product). Past research shows that in predicting the proportion of income spent on luxury goods, individual-level factors change over time. For example, although income determines expenditure for luxury goods in both communist and capitalist societies, the greater availability of goods in a free market economy enhances the strength of this relationship. In Poland, research has demonstrated this fact in the context of growing social inequality (Beskid 1999; Milic-Czerniak 1998; Sikorska 1998).

This chapter begins with a discussion of the general laws that govern expenditures on both necessities and luxuries in the context of social class and other opportunity structures. In the main part of the chapter, I examine the data on the relationship between social class and consumption under communism and in Polish society today. The empirical part of the chapter concludes by considering the degree to which access to disposable income affects individuals' perception of their material situation. In the discussion, I refer to some implications of the presented results for theorizing on social class.

Theoretical Background

In 1857, Ernst Engel stated that as individual income rises, the proportion spent on food declines. Expanding on Engel's original proposition, Wright argued that expenditures for rent and other necessary living expenses would also decline with income, while expenditures on certain luxuries would increase. Those who later interpreted these early ideas argued that, "the distribution of the budget, as shown by the actual expenditure, is a measure of the well-being of the people with or without regard to the total incomes of the families" (Zimmerman 1935; see also Zimmerman 1928, 1932 for a review).

These early researchers as well as contemporary ones generally argued that not only do these "laws" or generalizations hold at the individual level but also at the societal level (Brown and Deaton 1972). Accordingly, we should expect that wealthier countries spend less on food and more on luxuries than do poorer countries. In fact, cross-national studies conducted in the 1950s found support for these expectations. For example, Houthakker (1957) found that 64 percent of household expenditures in urban Polish households went toward food while in the United Kingdom only 35 percent was spent on the same budgetary items.

Does Engel's law hold when we look at a society undergoing radical economic transformation from a socialist economy to a capitalist economy?

In this chapter, I will test two hypotheses derived directly from Engel's law. The first hypothesis says that *as the overall economy in Poland improves, spending on food decreases*. Testing this hypothesis involves a comparison of the communist and the post-communist periods. In Poland during the communist era, food subsidies were a particularly contentious issue. Communist policies that decreased food subsidies often resulted in collective action that threatened the stability of the party's power. With the emergence of democratic elections, the policies influencing the cost of food continue to exercise an impact on the political stability of those currently in power.

The second hypothesis derived from Engel's law is that *as the overall economy in Poland improves, spending on luxuries increases*. I define luxuries as spending on both cultural activities and the acquisition of durable goods. During the communist period, Polish citizens were unable to acquire many of the durable goods they desired, not only because of their economic conditions but also because the access to goods was restricted by one's position in the political network. In particular, access to durable goods was easier for members of the communist party or the *nomenklatura* than it was for other citizens. Therefore, shifts over time in the patterns of ownership of durable goods have both economic and political components.

Social Class Differentiation

Engel's ideas were developed in the context of societies in which both disposable income and differentiation according to social class were increasing. In this context, early researchers disputed the assumption that Engel's laws would apply equally for all social classes. In addition, they began to consider the degree to which other budgetary items such as the cost of housing differed according to social class. Although Schwabe reported that there was no class difference in spending on rent, Lutge contradicted this finding. In an official study of German households in 1927–28, Lutge concluded that, "the expenditure for housing depends upon social rank: the higher the social rank the higher is the relative expenditure for housing" (Zimmerman 1935: 19). Lutge's study is one of the first describing consumers' preferences as differentiated by their position in the social structure. The relationship between social class and housing continues to interest scholars (Savage et al. 1990).

More contemporary scholars have added a new understanding to the study of social class and consumption patterns (Corrigan 1997). The most notable is Bourdieu's (1984) analysis in which he argues that consumption is an outcome of class culture and is used by higher classes to exclude other

classes from economic, political, and social participation. Subsequent to his original study, his ideas have been developed and enhanced by other researchers. In particular, Bihagen (1999) argues that higher classes use consumption to exclude other classes in three ways: (1) by demonstrating their conspicuous consumption, (2) by transmitting knowledge across generations, and (3) by achieving an advantage with respect to the access to information.

The “conspicuous-consumption thesis” has been well rooted in the sociological tradition. According to Veblen (1953 [1899]), in the nineteenth century, higher classes distinguish themselves from lower classes by consuming items with “superior cultural value” and avoiding popular appeal. Although excluding lower classes through the transmission of knowledge across generations and achieving an advantage with respect to access to information paralleled conspicuous consumption, it became particularly important at the post-industrial level of societal development (Bell 1973; Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Ritzer 2001).

In sociology, studying the relationship between social class and consumption patterns is also built around the idea that social classes share “values and beliefs that are manifested in specific norms and forms of behavior” (Lockwood 1995: 7; see also Zablocki and Kanter 1976). Thus, in accordance with this idea, researchers accumulated a considerable amount of empirical evidence demonstrating class differences in consumption patterns (Coleman 1983; Featherstone 1990; Uusitalo 1980; Crompton 1996). For instance, higher classes attend musical and theatrical performances while lower classes attend sporting events. Higher classes are more likely to prefer particular types of sophisticated foods while lower classes are more likely to enjoy “pub” food. These patterns hold across countries (Wittmayer et al. 1994).

In this chapter, I focus on how social classes make different uses of their income. First, I consider *how much social classes spend in terms of proportions of their household income on food and culture*. Next, I consider whether social class becomes a more important predictor of consumption over time, particularly in 1998 as compared to 1988. I expect social classes, such as the petty bourgeoisie, professionals, and office workers, to spend a smaller proportion of their income on food than do manual workers. I also expect the petty bourgeoisie, professionals, and office workers to spend a larger proportion of their income on cultural items. In addition, I analyze *to what extent higher social classes – such as professionals and the petty bourgeoisie – use conspicuous consumption to distinguish themselves from other social classes – manual workers, farmers, and office workers*.

Past Experience and Changing Opportunities

Clearly, one way that expenditure on household necessities affects individual actions is in the opportunity to buy household durable goods. This study allows me to assess the effects of previous spending on necessities on current levels of spending on luxuries. In particular, I expect that households that have spent a large proportion of their income on food in 1993 will own fewer durable goods in 1998. The relationship between spending on necessities and ownership of durable goods results, in part, from the fact that households spending large proportions of their income on food have not been able to accumulate the financial resources necessary to buy durable goods. In addition to the purely economic consideration, I also argue that expenditures on food have a psychological effect on future consumer decisions. Households that have previously spent a large proportion of their income on basic necessities will feel less confident about the affordability of durable goods. As a result, I expect that respondents from these households not only will own fewer durable goods, but also will perceive a decline in their material situations, even if household income is controlled.

Data and Measurement

Percent of household income spent on food is constructed by dividing the amount spent on food per month by the monthly household income, and then multiplying this ratio by 100. On average, households in Poland spend 48 percent of their monthly income on food, with a standard deviation of 18 percent, and a range from 25 percent to 100 percent.¹

Percent of household income spent on cultural activities is calculated analogously. The amount spent on cultural activities per month is divided by the monthly household income and multiplied by 100. On average, households in Poland spend 3 percent of their monthly income on cultural activities (standard deviation 0.04). This variable ranges from 0 percent to 5 percent.

In order to measure ownership of durable goods, I constructed an index comprised of five items: a phone, a television, a car of less than average value, a car of more than average value, and a computer. These items were

¹ For a small number of cases, approximately 1 percent of the sample, the respondent indicated that the household spent more on food per month than the total household monthly income. For this reason, some cases were dropped from the analysis.

assigned different weights reflecting their cost and accessibility. Phone and television received two points, a car of less than average value, three points, and a car of more than average value and a computer, five points. In creating an index of durable goods, I was primarily concerned with a reliable measure for capturing the standard of living over time. Therefore, I decided to construct an index that is the same in terms of indicators and weights across the three time points, 1988, 1993, and 1998. The index of durable goods therefore ranges from a score of zero for owning none of the above items to a score of fourteen points for owning a phone, a television, a car of more than the average value, and a computer. On average, the value of the index is 5.08, with a standard deviation of 3.81.

Perceived decline in material situation is measured using a single item in 1998 that asked respondents, "In the past five years has your material situation (1) improved significantly, (2) improved slightly, (3) neither improved nor worsened, (4) worsened somewhat, or (5) significantly worsened?" The average score on this item is 3.3 with a standard deviation of 1.1.

Independent Variables

Initially, the *class position* of the household was established by the respondent's current occupation in 1998. This resulted in 55 percent (N = 971) of the sample being assigned a class position. In 1998, the other 45 percent were classified as either unemployed (N = 95) or not working (N = 682). In order to identify a class position for these respondents, I used their occupation in 1993 if they were working, or, if not, their occupation in 1988. This resulted in 89 percent of the sample being assigned to a class position. Because the remaining 11 percent of the sample (N = 192) was outside of the labor force for the entire period 1988–98, I have chosen to remove them from my analysis. The average age of this group in 1998 is sixty-five; the group is comprised primarily of women (66 percent). However, it diversified according to other characteristics and was noncomparable with social classes.

Insofar as this analysis is concerned with expenditure patterns, I have chosen to create class categories that best reflect differences in lifestyles. These are: (1) the petty bourgeoisie, (2) professionals, (3) office workers, (4) manual workers, and (5) farmers. The petty bourgeoisie are comprised of both employers and the self-employed. Professionals include managers, supervisors, and professionals. Office workers, manual workers, and farmers refer to original single categories.

Since the applied measure of *social class* pertains not only to the present work situation but also to the past occupational career, I decided to include information on whether the respondent is presently unemployed or retired. Respondents who were currently not working and seeking employment were classified as *unemployed*; respondents currently not working and receiving retirement were coded as *retired*.

There are two important correlates of social class: income and education. In all analyses in this chapter, I use *household income* either in natural, continuous metric or as a categorical variable. Education is expressed in terms of both types and years of schooling.

The average number of persons, adults and children, living in the home is used to measure *household size*. In addition, I include two dichotomous variables indicating (a) the presence of children under the age of fourteen, and (b) a stay-at-home wife. Households were identified as having a stay-at-home wife if the respondent was a married female who stated that household duties were her primary occupation or if a married male respondent stated that his wife was currently not working.

Basic Patterns of Expenditure and Ownership of Durable Goods

Table 6.1 provides an overview of household expenditure patterns according to household characteristics. Social class highlights important and interesting differences among households. Clearly, the petty bourgeoisie and professionals are alike with respect to the proportion of their income spent on food, cultural activities, and ownership of durable goods. These two classes – the petty bourgeoisie and professionals – differ most from manual workers and farmers. Office workers are in the middle of the distribution on all types of expenditures.

Households containing an unemployed person spend considerably more than the national average on food and own fewer durable goods than the national average, yet their spending on cultural activities is not significantly different from that of the total population. Households containing a retired person spend approximately the same proportion of their household income on food and culture as do all households in the sample, but they do own fewer household items than the average.

Differences in patterns of consumption according to income levels are pronounced. I illustrate these differences using three income groups that divide the distribution into equal parts. For all three types of expenditures

Table 6.1. Distribution of Basic Expenditures by Household Characteristics in 1998

Household characteristics	Percent of household income on		Average score on durable goods index	Number of cases
	food	culture		
<i>Average</i>	47.5	3.2	5.1	1,574.0
<i>Social class</i>				
Petty bourgeoisie	40.9	4.0	8.9	169.0
Professionals	41.4	4.7	7.5	291.0
Office workers	46.9	3.4	5.7	327.0
Manual workers	51.2	2.6	4.0	470.0
Farmers	50.3	2.2	3.1	317.0
<i>Employment status</i>				
Unemployed	54.9	3.1	3.6	95.0
Retired	48.5	2.8	3.7	613.0
<i>Household income</i>				
Lower third	55.6	2.7	2.7	521.0
Middle third	48.7	3.4	4.7	516.0
Upper third	38.7	3.6	7.7	537.0
<i>Education</i>				
University	40.2	4.7	8.0	257.0
Secondary	44.5	3.8	5.8	168.0
Basic vocational	48.4	3.3	5.4	725.0
Primary	51.5	1.8	2.6	423.0
<i>Household composition</i>				
Average household size (4)	47.8	3.3	6.5	388.0
Children under fourteen in the home	50.2	3.1	5.5	558.0
Stay-at-home wife	54.5	2.8	4.7	245.0

there is significant variation across the three groups (spending on food $F = 146.14$; spending on culture $F = 7.77$; household durable goods index $F = 341.79$). Households in the lowest group spend 2.7 percent of their income on cultural activities while households in the highest group spend 3.6 percent. In the case of food, the difference is much larger. Households in the lowest group spend 56 percent of their income on food, as

compared with 39 percent for the highest group. However, the greatest difference between income groups pertains to durable goods. In terms of the index of durable goods, this difference amounts to 5.86 points. Only 46 percent of households in the lowest group own a telephone and 28 percent own a car of *less* than average value. In contrast, 84 percent of those in the highest group own a phone and 41 percent own a car of *more* than average value.

Analysis of consumption patterns with respect to education adds new information about social differentiation. There is significant variation across educational categories with respect to all three types of expenditures (spending on food $F = 25.13$; spending on culture $F = 38.47$; household durable goods index $F = 164.44$). No other variable produces as much variation in the proportion of income spent on cultural activities. The most educated spent 4.7 percent of household income on these activities while those with a primary education spent 1.8 percent of household income on cultural activities. Respondents with primary education live in households that spent not only the smallest proportion of their income on cultural activities but also the largest proportion of their income on food. They also own considerably fewer durable goods than do respondents from other educational categories.

Interestingly, a household comprised of two adults and two children spends an average amount of their household income on food and cultural activities but owns more durable goods than the sample average. In addition, there is not a great deal of difference between the average household and households with children under age fourteen years or households where the wife does not work.

Engel's Law and Social Classes

In Table 6.2, I present findings testing the two most basic hypotheses derived from Engel's law. As the overall economy in Poland improved between 1988 and 1998, the proportion of household income spent on food declined, as expected. With the exception of farmers, all social classes experienced a continuous reduction in the proportion of their household income that was necessary for basic food items. While a reduction occurs in the case of farmers, it was not a continuous decline. Furthermore, farmers experience the smallest reduction in the proportion of income spent on food among all social classes during the period 1988–98. The 3 percent decline for farmers can be contrasted with the continuous 17

percent decrease for the petty bourgeoisie. In general, we can conclude that Engel's law holds not only for society as whole but also for particular social classes.

Table 6.2. Average Household Expenditures on Food and Culture, and Ownership of Basic Household Goods by Social Class

Social class	Percent of household income on					Average score on		
	food			culture		durable goods index		
	1988	1993	1998	1988	1998	1988	1993	1998
Average	58.6	55.6	47.2	3.7	3.2	3.8	5.3	5.3
Petty bourgeoisie	58.2	50.4	40.9	4.4	4.0	5.2	8.7	8.9
Professionals	56.1	50.4	41.4	5.1	4.7	4.5	7.1	7.5
Office workers	60.1	56.1	46.9	4.1	3.4	4.0	5.8	5.7
Manual workers	62.9	59.3	51.2	3.1	2.6	2.9	3.8	4.0
Farmers	52.8	57.3	50.3	2.3	2.2	3.4	3.4	3.1
F statistic	10.07	11.33	20.38	14.24	21.95	42.40	118.42	137.52
Eta ²	0.04	0.03	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.10	0.23	0.26

Surprisingly, the percent of income spent on cultural activities did not change substantially between 1988 and 1998. In fact, spending on cultural activities declined slightly over time and the importance of class membership remained the same.

Ownership of durable goods did increase significantly between 1988 and 1998. For 1988, the average value of the index of durable goods is 3.75 points. At that time, 24 percent of households owned a telephone and 18 percent owned a car of less than average value. By 1998, the average value of the index of durable goods increased to 5.32 points. By this time, 67 percent of households owned a telephone and 36 percent owned a car of less than average value.

It is clear that social class position is an important predictor of ownership of durable goods over time. It explains 26 percent of the variation in the index. Note that the same independent variable explains 6 percent of the variation in the proportion of household income spent on food and culture. The predictive power of social class will next be examined in the context of other variables.

Predicting Expenditure on Food and Culture, and Ownership of Durable Goods

In Table 6.3 household expenditures in 1998 and the index of durable goods in 1998 is regressed on social class and other household characteristics. Social class, present employment status, household monthly income, education, and household composition explain 16 percent of the variation in food expenditures, 8 percent of the variation in cultural expenditures, and 36 percent of the variation in the index of durable goods. Controlling for other effects, social class consistently distinguishes households with respect to expenditures and ownership of durable goods.

Households of the petty bourgeoisie and professionals spend significantly less on food and more on culture, and they own more durable goods than do households of manual workers. In addition, office workers' households own more durable goods than do manual workers' households, controlling for other variables. Households of farmers are not significantly different from households of manual workers with respect to expenditure patterns or ownership of durable goods.

Monthly income significantly affects both types of expenditures and ownership of durable goods. As monthly income rises, spending on food decreases, spending on culture decreases, and ownership of durable goods increases. Controlling for other characteristics, one can note that people with secondary or basic vocational education spend significantly less on food than is the case for people with elementary education. Respondents with elementary education live in households spending the least amount of money on cultural activities and owning the fewest durable goods.

Household composition also matters. While household size positively affects spending on food, it negatively affects spending on cultural activities; and it positively affects ownership of durable goods. Having a stay-at-home wife though does increase spending on food and ownership of durable goods. However, there is no significant effect of households with children under age fourteen on expenditure patterns or ownership of durable goods, controlling for other variables.

Lasting Effects of Food Expenditures

In Table 6.4, I again regress the index of durable goods in 1998 on social class and other household characteristics, but I also include the amount of money spent on food in 1993. This model clearly shows that the amount of

Table 6.3. Regression of Spending on Food, Culture, and the Index of Durable Goods on Social Class and Other Household Characteristics

Household characteristics	Spending on food				Spending on culture				Index of household goods			
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
<i>Social class^a</i>												
Petty bourgeoisie	-0.039	0.016	-0.064*	0.008	0.004	0.057*	3.477	0.309	0.261*			
Professionals	-0.051	0.015	-0.111*	0.010	0.003	0.098*	2.160	0.276	0.218*			
Office workers	-0.007	0.013	-0.015	0.002	0.003	0.024	1.053	0.236	0.111*			
Farmers	-0.024	0.012	-0.051	-0.001	0.003	-0.013	-0.368	0.235	-0.037			
<i>Employment status</i>												
Unemployed	0.037	0.019	0.047*	0.002	0.004	0.010	-0.874	0.355	-0.052			
Retired	0.008	0.012	0.023	-0.003	0.003	-0.037	-0.458	0.231	-0.058			
Household monthly income (Multiplied by 1,000)	0.001	0.000	-0.288*	-0.001	0.000	-0.078*	0.281	0.035	0.177*			
<i>Education^b</i>												
University	-0.029	0.017	-0.063	0.023	0.004	0.225*	2.447	0.321	0.241*			
Secondary	-0.041	0.017	-0.074*	0.017	0.004	0.142*	1.484	0.314	0.123*			
Basic vocational	-0.022	0.011	-0.064*	0.014	0.003	0.178*	1.384	0.216	0.184*			
<i>Household composition</i>												
Household size	0.013	0.003	0.117*	-0.002	0.001	-0.079*	0.264	0.063	0.112*			
Children under fourteen in the home	0.012	0.011	0.034	0.002	0.003	0.022	-0.213	0.212	-0.027			
Stay-at-home wife present	0.047	0.013	0.093*	-0.003	0.003	-0.025	-0.532	0.236	-0.049*			
<i>Controls for respondent</i>												
Sex (Female=1)	-0.006	0.009	-0.017	-0.004	0.002	-0.049	-0.009	0.163	-0.001			
Age	-0.000	0.001	-0.008	0.000	0.000	0.026	-0.023	0.010	-0.073*			
Constant	0.501	0.034	0.025	0.008		3.185	0.635					
Adjusted R ²	0.163		0.081			0.366						

^a Reference category is manual workers. ^b Reference category is primary education. * p < 0.05

Table 6.4. Regression of the Index of Durable Goods and Perceived Decline in Material Situation on Social Class, Spending in 1993, and Other Household Characteristics

Household characteristics	Model 1 Index of durable goods			Model 2 Perceived decline in material situation		
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
<i>Social class^a</i>						
Petty bourgeoisie	3.364	0.310	0.259*	-0.156	0.107	-0.041
Professionals	1.907	0.282	0.194*	-0.127	0.098	-0.044
Office workers	0.942	0.242	0.100*	-0.112	0.084	-0.040
Farmers	-0.361	0.250	-0.034	0.291	0.087	0.094*
<i>Employment status</i>						
Unemployed	-1.018	0.358	-0.062*	0.687	0.124	0.140*
Retired	-0.360	0.237	-0.045	0.076	0.082	0.032
<i>Household monthly income</i> (Multiplied by 1,000)	0.391	0.045	0.198*	0.134	0.016	-0.230*
<i>Spending on food 1993</i>	-1.738	0.417	-0.090*	0.431	0.145	0.076*
<i>Education^b</i>						
University	2.333	0.335	0.228*	0.097	0.116	0.032
Secondary	1.324	0.324	0.111*	0.122	0.112	0.034
Basic vocational	1.494	0.224	0.199*	0.131	0.078	0.059
<i>Household composition</i>						
Household size	0.173	0.067	0.071*	0.042	0.023	0.058
Children under fourteen present	-0.094	0.219	-0.012	-0.074	0.076	-0.032
Stay-at-home wife present	-0.438	0.240	-0.041	0.144	0.083	0.045
Controls for respondent						
Sex (Female = 1)	0.045	0.168	0.006	0.097	0.058	0.044
Age	-0.022	0.011	-0.067*	0.014	0.004	0.142*
<i>Constant</i>	4.188	0.694		2.306	0.241	
<i>Adjusted R²</i>	0.373			0.142		

^a Reference category is manual workers.

^b Reference category is primary education.

* $p < 0.05$

money spent on food in the past negatively influences the ownership of durable goods. The impact of this variable is sizable and statistically significant.

In Table 6.4, model 2, I regress perceived decline in one's material situation on the same individual variables as in Model 1. Not only does spending on food in the past influence current material outcomes but it also affects the psychological assessment of one's material situation. While the impact of previous spending on food on the perceived decline in one's material situation is not very large, it is nevertheless statistically significant. Other significant determinants of perceived decline in one's material situation include household monthly income, being a farmer, being unemployed, and age.

Discussion and Conclusion

I began this paper by asking whether the patterns predicted by Engel's law hold for a country experiencing a rapid transition to a market economy. Overall, Engel's law is supported in the context of Poland. As the economy has improved, spending on food has decreased. With respect to spending on luxuries, the situation is more complex. Contrary to the expectation that the proportion of monthly income spent on cultural activities would increase over time, it remained stable between 1988 and 1998. However, in the same period, the ownership of certain durable goods such as phones, television, cars, and computers increased substantially.

The results presented here also show that there has been a substantial increase in the amount of differentiation between households in Poland. Thus, in this context we can return to what has become a basic question in sociological research: *does class matter?* While some argue that the utility of this concept is questionable on empirical grounds (Pakulski and Water 1996), the research presented here joins a growing body of research that contradicts such claims. Interestingly, while sociologists studying outcomes such as voting and social mobility have questioned the importance of class, the majority of those who study consumption patterns have not (Bocock 1993; Corrigan 1997; Crompton 1996; Coleman 1983).

In Poland, consumption patterns distinguish social classes from one another. Households of the petty bourgeoisie and professionals have substantially more durable goods than do households of office workers, manual workers, and farmers. Some of these class differences are large. For example, 56 percent of all petty bourgeoisie own a car of more than average value, while only 21 percent of office workers own a car of similar value. In addition, the more educated social classes consume information technology that provides advantages to their children. While 30 percent of all

professionals' households own a computer, only 5 percent of manual workers' households do so. Interestingly, class differentiation in consumption patterns was already evident in 1988, but between-class inequality has increased dramatically over time.

To some extent, differences in consumption patterns can be understood as emerging from the different lifestyles of the various social classes (Zablocki and Kanter 1976). However, the lifestyle argument is not supported by the results pertaining to cultural consumption. Differences among all social classes are not particularly large with respect to expenditures on culture. Basic correlates of social class – education and income – do not differentiate significantly this dimension of activity, either.

Spending on basic necessities has lasting effects on economic behavior and attitudes. Disproportionately large spending on food at the end of the initial phase of the post-communist transition influenced ownership of durable goods in the advanced phase of this transition. It also has a negative psychological effect. Increased spending on food in 1993 produced the belief that one's material situation had declined over the next five years. Previous research has found differences in the effects of education and class position on the perceived decline in one's material situation (Beskid 1999; Milic-Czerniak 1998; Palaszewska-Reindel 1998; Sikorska 1998). My analyses suggest that the impact of various social characteristics on economic self-evaluation is less salient, once past expenditures on food have been controlled.