

Problems of social

~~inequality, social~~

stratification and political

elites

Understanding Inequality

- ***Inequality*** is the unequal access to scarce goods or resources.
 - It is found in most, if not all, societies.
 - It is a question of *how unequal* a society is.

Understanding Social Stratification

Social stratification is the division of society into groups arranged in a social hierarchy based on access to wealth, power and prestige. Ex: slavery, caste and social class

Where people rank in stratification system influences *every* part of their lives in profound ways.

- What food they eat, where they shop, clothes they wear, schools they attend, income they earn, how long (and quality of life) they live, occupation.

Social Stratification



- Every society has some form of social stratification, but societies group people on different criteria (such as race, class, and gender).
- Social stratification is a characteristic of society; it persists over generations, and it is maintained through beliefs (and ideologies) that are widely shared by members of society.
- How are we ok with some having more than others?

Systems of Stratification (Cont'd)

- ***Social class*** refers to a system of stratification based on access to resources such as wealth, property, power, education and prestige.
- Sociologists often refer to it as ***socioeconomic status*** (or ***SES***).
- By the way, what's the difference between income and wealth?

Social Classes in the United States

- The ***upper class (capitalist class)***:
 - Wealthiest people in a class system
 - Make up about 1% of the U.S. population
 - Possess most of the wealth of the country

Social Classes in the United States

- The ***upper-middle class***:
 - Professionals and managers
 - Make up about 14% of the U.S. population
 - Benefited the most from college
- The ***middle class*** consists primarily of
 - “White collar” workers
 - Have a broad range of incomes
 - Make up about 30% of the U.S. population

Social Classes in the United States

- The ***working (lower-middle) class***:
 - “Blue-collar” or service industry workers
 - Less likely to have college degrees
 - Make up about 30% of the U.S. population

Social Classes in the United States

- The ***lower class (the working poor)***:
 - Many poor people who typically have lower levels of literacy than other classes
 - Make up about 20% of the U.S. population

Theories of Social Class

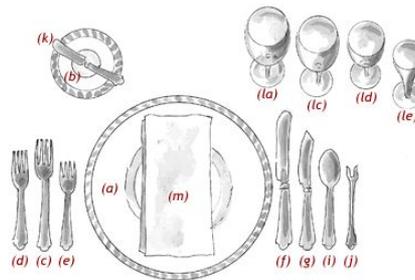
- **Karl Marx** believed that there were two main social classes in capitalist societies:
 - Capitalists (or *bourgeoisie*), who owned the means of production
 - Workers (or *proletariat*), who sold their labor for wages
- He believed that the classes would remain divided and social inequality would grow.
 - Has social inequality grown?

Theories of Social Class

- **Max Weber** offered a similar model that also included cultural factors.
- He argued that class status was made of three components:
 - Wealth (or Privilege, inherited assets)
 - Power
 - Prestige

Theories of Social Class

- More recently, Pierre Bourdieu argued each generation acquires ***cultural capital*** (tastes, habits, expectations, skills, knowledge, etc.) that help us to gain advantages in society
- This cultural capital either helps or hinders us as we become adults.



Theories of Social Class

- ***Symbolic Interactionists*** examine the way we use status differences to categorize ourselves and others.
- As ***Erving Goffman*** pointed out, our clothing, speech, gestures, possessions, friends, and activities provide information about our socioeconomic status.

TABLE 8.2***Theory in Everyday Life***

Perspective	Approach to Social Inequality	Case Study: Poverty
STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALISM	Social inequality is a necessary part of society. Even poverty has functions that help maintain social order.	The functions of poverty for society include the fact that the poor take otherwise undesirable jobs, live in otherwise unacceptable housing, purchase discount and secondhand goods, and provide work for thousands, including social service caseworkers and others who work with the poor.
CONFLICT THEORY	Social inequality creates intergroup conflict—poor and rich groups have different interests and may find themselves at odds as they attempt to secure and protect them.	Social welfare programs that assist the poor are funded by tax dollars, which some wealthy citizens may be reluctant to provide because taxes reduce their net income. This can create conflict between rich and poor groups in society.
SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM	Social inequality is part of our presentation of self.	Poor and wealthy persons have differential access to the “props” used to project particular versions of self. In particular, professional clothing such as business suits can be too expensive for poor individuals to purchase, which can put them at a disadvantage in job interviews, where a professional image is necessary. Organizations like Dress for Success provide professional clothing for those who can’t afford it, leveling the playing field a bit in terms of impression management.

Socioeconomic Status and Life Chances

- Belonging to a certain social class has profound consequences for individuals in all areas of life including:
 - Education
 - Employment
 - medical care

Social Mobility

- ***Social mobility*** is the movement of individuals or groups within the hierarchical system of social classes.
- America technically has an open system (it is legal and permissible for people to move between classes) but there are structural patterns where people tend to stay very close to the class they were raised in.
- If we have an open system, why do we see a lack of opportunities to move between classes?

Poverty

- The ***culture of poverty*** refers to learned attitudes that can develop among poor communities and lead the poor to accept their fate rather than attempt to improve their situation.
- What is missing from this theory?

Political elite

- In every society there is a class of people which is though small in number but has more control over political power. The power belonging to this class occupy command offices and provide leadership in ruling affairs of the society and this class of the people is known as elite

Characteristics of political elites

- Small in number
- Organised
- Monopoly over political power
- Open competition among different elite groups
- Conscious of their interests

Elitist Theorists

“pluralists” or “functionalists”

- Mosca, Parsons
- Mosca's enduring contribution to political science is the observation that all but the most primitive societies are ruled in fact, if not in theory, by a numerical minority. He named this minority the ***political class***

Lesson Quiz

True or False:

1. Every society has some form of stratification.

- a. True
- b. False

Lesson Quiz

- 2. The tendency of social classes to remain relatively stable as social class status is passed down from one generation to the next is called:
 - a. cultural capital.
 - b. social prestige.
 - c. social reproduction.
 - d. class consciousness.

Lesson Quiz

- 3. Entrenched attitudes that can develop among poor communities and lead the poor to accept their fate is called:
 - a. the culture of poverty.
 - b. the just-world hypothesis.
 - c. disenfranchisement.
 - d. social welfare.

Lesson Quiz

- 4. Max Weber argued that there were several important components of social class. Which of the following is NOT one of the components?
 - a. Prestige
 - b. Power
 - c. Wealth
 - d. Morals