Social Class

- The single most important variable in society?
  - It correlates with almost all other social characteristics from birth to death.
    - Rich babies come out healthier and weighing more than poor babies.
    - Rich babies come home to better living conditions in terms of both physical and socio-emotional health, as well as intellectual stimulation.
    - Rich children benefit from schools that spend more on their students, have smaller class sizes, and more enrichment programs.
    - Rich children benefit from raised expectations by their teachers.
    - And so on...

Social Stratification

- Social stratification refers to a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy.
- Stratification is a trait of society, not simply a reflection of individual differences.
  - Stratification persists over generations.
  - There is the opportunity for social mobility.
  - Stratification is universal.
  - Social stratification involves inequality and beliefs.
- Having more of something, wealth, power, prestige, intelligence, initiative, earning potential, health, education, taste, verbal facility, etc. results in the reaping of social rewards.
- People in lower-ranking groups (strata) tend to receive corresponding smaller shares of social rewards (that’s really only fair… right?)
- Is sociology really concerned with what is fair?
The Analogy of Gender

- What would be the consequence of telling young girls that they have had an equal opportunity throughout our nation’s history?
  - Why is there no female president?
  - Why do women earn less?
  - Why are women judged by their appearance more than men?
  - Why do women take so long in the restroom?
  - …. it must be a defect of the gender.

- American’s have been willing to credit some amount of racial discrimination as the cause of poverty among racial/ethnic “minorities” and sex discrimination as a cause of women’s inequality, but are very reluctant to recognize class as contributing to perpetuation of poverty in general.

Stratification Systems

- Characteristics
  - Systems persist for a long time.
  - Systems are resistant to change.
  - The system is bolstered by widely accepted legitimizing rationales.

Slavery

- Can exist in any stratification system.
- Individuals are owned and treated as property.
- Has primarily understood as an ascribed status situation.
- Historically, largely, based on debt, deviance, and war.
- “Bonded laborers” are imprisoned in virtual lifetime of employment.
  - Guest workers and illegal immigrants are forced to labor for years under terrible conditions to pay off debt or avoid being turned over to immigration authorities.
Slavery (Continued)

- **Legitimizing Rationale** - Ownership of Sub-Humans
  - Old Testament
  - Koran
  - Greeks and Romans

Caste Systems

- Determined at birth.
- Ascribed.
- Restricted or closed system.
- Endogamy, No intermingling (Separation).
- Division of labor between castes.
- Understood hierarchy.
- The Dalit or untouchables.
- **Legitimizing Rationale**: Karma

Estate System

- Determined at birth.
- Can be achieved but most commonly ascribed.
- Closed system.
- Serfs were connected to the land.
  - Mutual benefit: protection for servitude.
- Problems began to arise:
  - Members of the 3rd estate (merchants) began to do well for themselves.
  - 3rd Estate became commoners
Class System

- **Legitimizing Rationale**: The opportunity to “get ahead” is available to all.
- The position you reach is the result of your own effort.
- Inequality is legitimate because people end up where they deserve to be.
- **Meritocracy**
  - Stratification based on social merit.

Marx and Class

- Economist not a sociologist (so he says).
- Class is best understood as an economic condition.
- Individuals positions in relation to the means of production.
  - **The Bourgeoisie** – Those who own the means of production.
  - **The Proletariat** – The workers who sell their labor to the bourgeoisie.

**Communist Manifesto - Intro**

- Inequality always existed in society.

**The Bourgeoisie and Proletariat**

- The means of production are the resources which are used to produce profit, and therefore wealth.
- Workers (The proletariat) keep the profits they make from their workers’ efforts.
- These two classes are inherently in opposition to one another.
- Antagonisms are built into the system itself regardless of how individuals think about it.
Latent Functions / Dysfunctions of the Capitalist Economic System

- Change is normal.
- Global Expansion of markets.
- The creation of periodic economic crises
  - Epidemic of overproduction.

The Effect on the Workers

- Live as long as they find work and find work only so long as their labor increases capital.
- Minimum wage is the wage that will keep the worker from starving or freezing, and will also allow the workers to reproduce.
- With increased specialization tasks become increasingly more menial and therefore alienating.
- Laborers become indistinguishable.
- Mom & Pop are unable to compete with newer methods of production.

Marx Wrap-Up

- Marx and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto to incite the worker to the point of revolt. Why has this not happened?
- Class Consciousness - Subjective awareness of common vested interests and the need for collective political action to bring about social change.
- False Consciousness - The understanding held by members that does not accurately reflect their class positions.
- Dahrendorf proposes:
  - Fragmentation has given more people a stake in the system.
  - Standard of living has improved.
  - Workers are better organized.
  - Legal protection for workers.
Weber on Class

- According to Weber social class and one’s standing within the strata depends on:
  - Where one is in the Market Situation (i.e. wealth or property).
  - Power / Authority (Legitimate Power).
  - Status Group
    - Prestige
    - Social honor

- Weber introduces the concept of socioeconomic status or SES.

Bourdieu on Class

- Economic Capital
  - Command over economic resources.

- Social Capital
  - Command over relationships.

- Cultural Capital
  - Material.
  - Embodied.

Social Mobility

- Open vs. Closed Systems
- Vertical Mobility (Upward or Downward)
- Horizontal Mobility
- Intergenerational Mobility
- Intragenerational Mobility
Social Mobility in the United States

- Social mobility through the 20th century was very high.
- Social mobility within a single generation is typically very small.
- The long-term trend in social mobility, since the industrial revolution, has been upward.
- Social mobility since the 1970s has been uneven.
  - In relation to inflation gains for most Americans have slowed and even begun to fall in the beginning of the 21st century.

Some Principles of Stratification Davis and Moore

- Functionalist Paradigm
  - Assertion that society must place and motivate individuals within their proper position.
  - Qualifications come from inherent capacity, training, or, most likely both.
  - Those positions with the greatest functional importance and scarcity of qualified individuals will yield the greatest rewards.

Some Principles of Stratification

1. Some positions are more important than others and require special skills.
2. A limited number of individuals have the talent to acquire these special skills.
3. Developing talent into skills requires of period of sacrifice.
4. To justify the sacrifice there must be incentives (desired rewards).
5. The rewards are: comfort, leisure, self-worth.
6. The unequal talents / training result in an unequal distribution of rewards.
7. Stratification is positively functional and inevitable for society.
New Propositions (Conflict Paradigm) - Tumin

1. Stratification systems function to limit the discovery of the full talent range.

2. Stratification systems set limits upon the possibility of expanding productive resources (new solutions, innovations).

3. Stratification provides the elite with political power by which they can rationalize their advantage.

4. Stratification unequally distributes self-image / esteem; encouraging some horizons to expand and others to diminish.

5. Stratification encourages hostility and distrust limiting the opportunity for social integration.

6. Stratification unequally distributes one’s sense of membership within their own society.

7. Stratification similarly unequally distributes loyalty, based on one’s sense of connection to their society.

8. Consequently, stratification systems function to distribute the motivation to participate unequally in a population.

Dominant Ideology

- Cultural beliefs and practices help to maintain powerful social, economic, and political interests.

- Stratification persists because it is backed up by an ideology (cultural beliefs that justify or legitimize social stratification).

- The idea is that some type of inequality is considered “fair”.

Income vs. Wealth

- Income is the amount of money that an individual or family group earns/receives in wages, salaries, investments, etc.

- Wealth is the total value of the assets owned less the debts an individual or family group has.
“Wealth signifies the command over financial resources that a family has accumulated over its lifetime along with those resources that have been accumulated over generations…. Wealth is a special form of money not used to purchase milk and shoes and other life necessities. More often it is used to create opportunity, secure a desired stature and standard of living, or pass along class status to one’s children”

- Max Weber

The Importance of Wealth

- Wealth (having it or not) is enduring.
  - It accumulates and perpetuates through generations.
- If there were an equality of opportunity individual class origins should not be a determinant of socioeconomic achievement.
  - Neither poverty nor wealth should necessarily be intergenerational.
  - Volumes of scientific data that demonstrate that people have a greater chance of succeeding in life if their parents are not poor.
    - Health / Mental Health
    - Education
    - Working Life
    - Crime and Justice
    - Luck

The Matthew Effect

- “Once wealth is accumulated wealth leads to income-earning opportunities that are not open to those without wealth” - Thurow (1996).
- Capital gains currently average 4-5% annually.
- Economic growth is currently at 2-3% annually.
- The Gini Index (2009)
The Classes

• The Capitalist Class
  o One percent of the population.
  o Worth more than the entire bottom 90 percent of the country.
  o Blue bloods and the nouveau riche.

• Upper Middle Class
  o 15 percent of the population.
  o Class most shaped by education.
  o They’ve “made it”.

• Lower Middle Class
  o 34 percent of the population.
  o The lower middle class works for the upper middle and capitalist classes.
  o Believe they could experience upward mobility while also feeling vulnerable to slipping down the ladder.

• The Working Class
  o 30 percent of the population.
  o Unskilled blue-collar and white-collar workers.
  o Less educated.
  o Jobs are less secure.

• The Working Poor
  o 15 percent of the population.
  o Unskilled, low-paying, often temporary work.

• The Underclass
  o 5 percent of the population.
  o Little to no connection to the job market.
  o Little to no connection to society.
Poverty

- Absolute Poverty: Minimum level of subsistence that no family should [can] live below.
- Relative Poverty: Floating standard by which people at the bottom of society are defined as being disadvantaged in comparison to the nation as a whole.
- Feminization of Poverty: Increasing proportion of poor in the U.S. have been women [and children].
  - Why might this be? Sociologically speaking.

Interactionist View of Class

- What does it mean to belong to a country club?
- What type of interaction does your SES give you access to?
- How do the non-affluent characterize the affluent?
- How do the affluent characterize the non-affluent?
- Consider the meanings attached to being rich or poor.

Cultural Explanation for Inequality

- Cultural Explanation
  - People in different social classes have different values, beliefs, and behavioral norms which are passed down through socialization.
  - These values, beliefs, and behavioral norms are incompatible with success in society.

Culture, Expectations, Outcomes

- The Pygmalion Effect
  - “Spurters” or “Bloomers”
  - 1 in 5 randomly identified as such.
  - Spurters had significantly better performance on intelligence test.
  - Spurters had significant gains in GPA as well.
Structural Explanation for Inequality

- Focus is on the limited access to opportunities that poor people have compared to the more affluent.
- Those who support the structural explanation argue that cultural explanations mask or cover-up the inadequacies and injustices of the social structure.
- Society is primarily responsible for poverty… there is not enough work to support families.
  - W. Wilson

Structural Mobility

- Structural mobility has little or nothing to do with changes in the quality of individuals; structural mobility has to do with changes in the social structure of society.
  - Industrialization
  - Technology

Other Factors

- Class differences in birthrates have facilitated some amount of social mobility.
  - People in the upper classes tend to marry later and have fewer children than people in lower classes.
  - The upper class do not produce enough off-spring to meet the demands of the job market.
- Immigration
  - New residents tend to enter into the strata at the lowest rungs pushing residents of low socioeconomic status up, assuming there is an “up” to move to.