Explanations of Stratification

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http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134

Basic stratification terms

- Stratification: ranking system for groups of people that perpetuates unequal rewards and life chances in society
- Socioeconomic status (SES): prestige, honor, respect, and lifestyle associated with different positions or groups in society (p. 330)
- Social mobility: movement of people or groups from one class to another (p. 330)
  - Social mobility may be intragenerational or intergenerational
- What differs from one stratification system to another?
  - What determines a person’s status (e.g., ascribed vs. achieved characteristics)?
  - How much social mobility is allowed?

Four stratification systems

- Slavery: economic forms of inequality in which some people are legally the property of others (p. 327)
  - Slavery systems vary in how slavery status is determined and whether mobility is allowed
- Caste system: stratification system based on heredity, with little movement allowed across strata (p. 329)
- Estate system (feudal system): stratification system in which high-status groups own land and have power based on birth (p. 329)
  - Little social mobility is allowed
- Social class: group of people who share a similar economic position in society, based on their wealth and income (p. 330)
  - There are no legal limits on social mobility, but actual mobility is limited

Measuring class

- Sociologists typically measure socioeconomic status (SES) by combining income, occupation and education (not wealth)
- Sociologist Dalton Conley has recently proposed that wealth must be added to measures of SES
  - Of blacks and whites with similar SES, whites tend to have much more wealth

Selected occupational prestige scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected occupational prestige scores</th>
<th>Physician</th>
<th>47</th>
<th>Machinist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>College professor</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Bank teller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Clergy member</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Welder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Registered nurse</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Childcare worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Elementary teacher</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Computer programmer</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Retail apparel salesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Editor/reporter</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Truck driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Police officer</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Waiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Firefighter</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Farm laborer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Computer operator</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Janitor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Structural-functionalism view

- Inequality (stratification) is functional and a source of social order
- Function of stratification described by Davis & Moore
  - Society needs to fill most important and difficult jobs with the more talented people
  - If all jobs had same rewards, people would get less training and take easy jobs
  - By attaching better rewards to more important positions, society motivates people to get training and work in more important jobs

### Criticisms of functionalist view
1. Assumes better paying jobs are more important
2. Assumes training for top jobs is undesirable
3. Stratification involves ascribed characteristics (e.g., race & gender)

## Conflict views

- Stratification is a source of conflict, coercion and unhappiness
- Stratification systems are designed to benefit “haves” at expense of “have-nots”
- Marx’s class model: two-class system focuses on means of production and ability to control labor of others
  - Means of production: land, commercial enterprises, factories, and wealth that form the economic basis of class societies (p. 343)
  - Capitalist (bourgeoisie): someone who owns the means of production and is able to purchase the labor power of others (p. 343)
  - Worker (proletariat): individual who neither owns means of production nor has the ability to purchase the labor power of others and who must instead sell his or her own labor to survive (p. 343)

## Conflict views, continued

- More recent conflict models have built upon Marx’s insights but add other variables
  - Wright’s class model (p. 345) includes managers, who have authority but not ownership of the means of production
  - Conflict models of political power apply Marx’s insights to critique pluralist view that power in U.S society is evenly distributed among a number of diverse interest groups
  - Other conflict theorists have focused on non-economic factors that affect stratification, e.g., gender and race

### Conflict theorists argue that people are often unaware of effect of stratification system on their life-chances
- False consciousness: situation in which people in the lower classes come to accept a belief system that harms them; the primary means by which powerful classes in society prevent protest and revolution (p. 344)
- Class consciousness: awareness of one’s class identify and interests