Explanations for Stratification, continued

March 25, 2005

http://www.iastate.edu/~soc.134
Structural-functionalist 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 little training and take easiest 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. 338)
  • Capitalist (bourgeoisie): someone who owns the means of production and is able to purchase the labor power of others (p. 338)
  • 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. 338)
More recent conflict models have built upon Marx’s insights but add other variables

- Wright’s class model (p. 340) 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 affect 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. 339)
- Class consciousness: awareness of one’s class identify