

There's More Online!

- ✓ CHART Intergenerational Mobility in the United States
- ✓ GRAPHIC ORGANIZER Social Mobility
- ✓ IMAGE Indian Social Order
- ✓ SELF-CHECK QUIZ



LESSON 3

Social Mobility

Reading HELPDESK



Academic Vocabulary

- occupation
- category

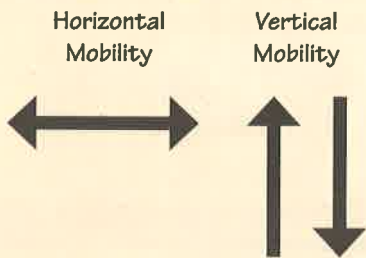
Content Vocabulary

- social mobility
- horizontal mobility
- vertical mobility
- intergenerational mobility
- caste system
- open-class system

TAKING NOTES:

Key Ideas and Details

ORGANIZING As you read, use a graphic organizer like the one below to diagram social mobility. Add a definition to each arrow.



ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS • What is “equality”? • To what extent are societies unequal?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Social mobility, the movement of individuals or groups within the stratification structure, is usually measured by changes in occupational status. Sociologists are most interested in upward or downward (vertical) mobility. Closed-class systems permit little vertical mobility; open-class systems, such as those in industrialized countries, allow considerable vertical mobility.

Types of Social Mobility

GUIDING QUESTION What are the types of social mobility?

Mobility is, quite simply, the ability to move. People move in many ways. They may change jobs or move from a city to a suburb or one neighborhood to another.

In a social science context, mobility is most often used to refer to the movement of individuals, families, or groups within the layers of a stratified social structure. In other words, **social mobility** is the movement of people or groups between social classes. Social mobility can be *horizontal* or *vertical*.

Horizontal mobility involves changing from one **occupation** to another at the same social class level, as when an army captain becomes a public school teacher, a minister becomes a psychologist, or a restaurant server becomes a taxi driver. Because horizontal mobility involves no real change in occupational status or social class, sociologists are not generally interested in investigating it.

Vertical mobility, however, is another story. With **vertical mobility**, a person’s occupational status or social class moves upward or downward. The change can be viewed in terms of just the individual or in the context of his or her family. When the change takes place over a generation, it is called **intergenerational mobility**. A plumber’s daughter becoming a physician is a case of upward intergenerational mobility. If a lawyer’s son becomes a carpenter, downward intergenerational mobility has occurred.

✓ READING PROGRESS CHECK

Finding the Main Idea What role does class play in vertical mobility?

Caste and Open-Class Systems

GUIDING QUESTION How is a caste system different from an open-class system?

The extent of vertical mobility varies from society to society. Some societies have considerable mobility. Others have little or none. This is the major difference between caste (or closed-class) systems and open-class systems.

In a **caste system** there is no social mobility because social status is inherited and cannot be changed. In a caste system, statuses (including occupations) are ascribed, or assigned, at birth. Individuals cannot change their status through any efforts of their own. Those in one caste are allowed to marry only within their own caste. They must limit relationships of all types with those below and above them in the stratification structure. Apartheid, as practiced in South Africa before the election of Nelson Mandela, was a caste system based on race.

social mobility the movement of individuals or groups between social classes

horizontal mobility a change in occupation within the same social class

occupation one's business or profession

Connecting Sociology to

Anthropology



INDIA'S TRADITIONAL SOCIAL SYSTEM

Anthropologists study how people and cultures are distinct from other people and cultures. One way to illustrate a distinction is to study the class system. It became an important part of Indian life and culture and is still practiced today, although not officially. In this excerpt from an introduction to anthropology, John Monaghan and Peter Just describe the traditional Indian social order.

PRIMARY SOURCE

“Classic Hindu cosmology provides a coherent model of a fixed social order that combines marriage within the group (and therefore shared blood), occupational specialization (and therefore the division of labor in society), and relative degrees of spiritual purity (and therefore hierarchical ranking). In theory every person is born into a *jati*, a group which has a local monopoly on a particular occupation (such as blacksmiths, weavers, and so on). A person takes a spouse from within the *jati*, as do all of the person's descendants. The various *jatis* are hierarchically ranked with respect to one another, a ranking that is reinforced in daily behavior by prohibitions against higher-caste individuals taking food and drink from those of a lower caste. All of this is supported by an elaborate system of meaning and belief, much of it given spectacular ritual expression, that lies at the heart of Hinduism. In reality, of course, things are more fluid and complex, especially in contemporary India: *jatis* are actually far from endogamous, individuals are free to pursue occupations not reserved to a specific *jati* in a particular place, and the relative rankings of *jatis* turn out to shift over time and space in subtle ways.”

—from *Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 2010



In India's traditional social system, *Dalits* were below the lowest class.

DBQ ► CRITICAL THINKING

- 1. Contrasting** How do sociologists and anthropologists analyze India's class system differently?
- 2. Identifying Central Issues** How have *jatis* “modernized” in contemporary India?

vertical mobility a change upward or downward in occupational status or social class

intergenerational mobility a change in status or class from one generation to the next

caste system a stratification structure that does not allow for social mobility

category a defined group

open-class system a system in which social class is based on merit and individual effort; movement is allowed between classes

Sociologists consider India's traditional social system to be a caste system as well. Historically, the class system in India, known as the *varna* system, was based on ideas about religious purity. People did traditional occupations based on *varna*, or class into which they were born. There were four *varnas*. The Brahmins served as priests and scholars. *Kshatriyas* served in professional, governing, and military occupations. *Vaisyas* were merchants and other businesspeople. *Sudras* were farmers, craft workers, and laborers. Outside of the *varna* system was a fifth **category**, the *Dalits*, who have also been referred to as the "Untouchables." Traditionally, this group has been seen as the most impure and polluted group. Their occupations included jobs that were seen as unclean, such as leatherworking, handling dead bodies, and collecting trash. The *varna* system is not legally enforced and is not officially recognized by the Indian government, which has worked for decades to eliminate the system from Indian life.

People in urban India have become less rigid about following the class system than people in rural areas. Where traditional rules are followed, not everyone understands the religion the same way, and movement into a higher class is difficult. It is also difficult to date or marry someone from a higher class.

Open-Class System

In an **open-class system**, an individual's social class is based on merit and individual effort. Individuals move up and down the stratification structure as their abilities, education, and resources permit. Most people in the United States believe they live in an open-class system. In reality, the opportunity for upward mobility can be limited for individuals or groups in the United States. For example, because of discrimination or lack of resources, some members of minority groups have been denied opportunities for social mobility. Therefore, because it imposes some limitations on upward mobility, American society cannot be considered truly and completely open. It is, however, a relatively open-class system.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining How does ascribed status affect social mobility?

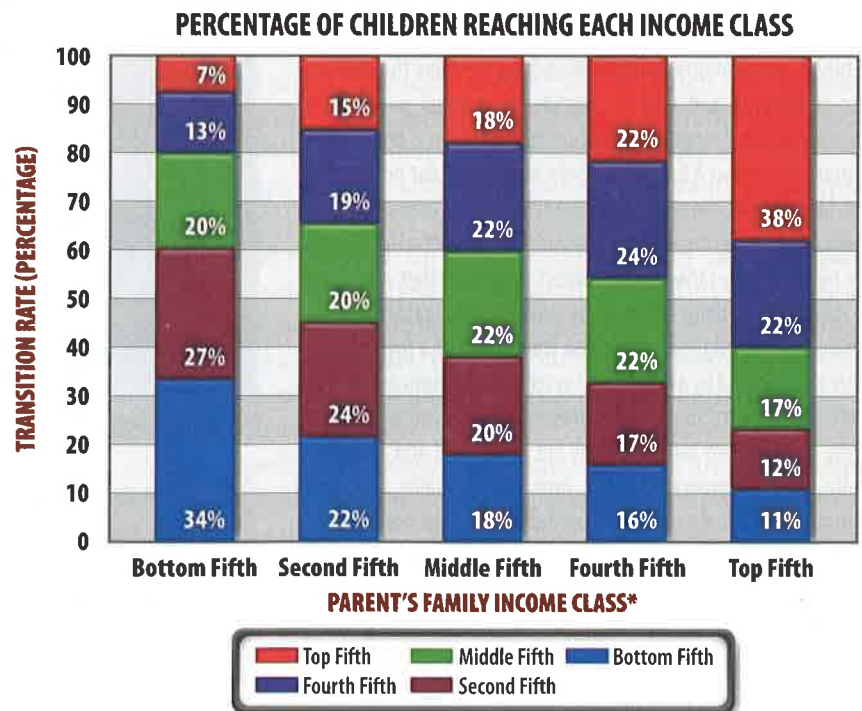
CHART >

INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY IN THE UNITED STATES

This chart shows the movement between classes from one generation to the next. Each bar represents the income class of a child's parent. The colors represent the income class of the child. For example, the last bar shows that 11 percent of children who came from the top income class fell to the bottom class.

CRITICAL THINKING

- Classifying** Which income class shows the least intergenerational upward mobility?
- Analyzing** What percentage of children from middle-income families experienced downward mobility?



*Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Source: Bhashkar Mazumder, *Upward Intergenerational Economic Mobility in the United States*, 2008.

Upward and Downward Mobility

GUIDING QUESTION What does it mean to be upwardly or downwardly mobile?

Few countries provide the opportunities for advancement available in the United States. Nevertheless, countless Americans fail to be upwardly mobile despite talent and hard work. Many people find this hard to accept because American tradition—historical and fictional—has many examples of upward mobility.

Earlier generations of Americans were raised on the “rags to riches” stories of Horatio Alger. The books taught that the only things standing between any American and success were talent, a willingness to work, and perseverance. People also point to political leaders like Abraham Lincoln and business leaders like Henry Ford to support the idea of unlimited mobility in American society. In truth, these men are exceptions. Great leaps in social class are rare. Upward mobility typically involves only a small improvement over the social class situation of one’s parents.

After World War II, an explosion in the availability of high-paying manufacturing jobs made it relatively easy for people to move upward. Americans came to expect that their children would have more than they had, but this may not be the case today. This change is the result of new technology and the globalization of business. Computer-driven production and faster means of communication and transportation allow American companies to lower their costs by moving manufacturing operations overseas, eliminating many high-paying manufacturing jobs at home. American workers who lack the education needed to perform more technologically sophisticated jobs are being forced to take lower-paying jobs.

An economic recession beginning in late 2007 cost many Americans their jobs. Circumstances forced some people into lower-paying jobs while others took cuts in pay and benefits. Millions of families lost their homes to foreclosure. Compared to their parents, more U.S. workers are experiencing downward mobility.

In *Falling from Grace*, sociologist Katherine Newman describes America’s enduring belief in the rewards of hard work. This belief, she writes, prevents recognition of the downward mobility experienced by many middle-class people. She argues that the consequences are enormous for people in a society that measures worth by occupational status. Downwardly mobile people experience lowered self-esteem, despair, depression, feelings of powerlessness, and a loss of a sense of honor.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying What are some of the signs of downward mobility in the United States?



British author J.K. Rowling is an example of extreme upward mobility as she rose from extreme poverty to great wealth as a result of the success of her Harry Potter books.

CRITICAL THINKING

Synthesizing Why is J.K. Rowling an exception to the rule in terms of social mobility?

LESSON 3 REVIEW



Reviewing Vocabulary

- Defining** What is a caste system?
- Describing** What is the key element of intergenerational mobility?

Using Your Notes

- Explaining** Use the notes in your graphic organizer to describe social mobility.

Answering the Guiding Questions

- Identifying** What are the types of social mobility?

- Contrasting** How is a caste system different from an open-class system?

- Explaining** What does it mean to be upwardly or downwardly mobile?

Writing Activity

- Argument** How do you think the myth of upward mobility affects actual upward mobility in the United States?