

SOCIOLOGY AND YOU



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Presentations *for the* Classroom

Chapter 8 Social Stratification

EXIT





Social Stratification

Summary of Topics

- [Dimensions of Stratification](#)
- [Explanations of Stratification](#)
- [Social Classes in America](#)
- [Poverty in America](#)
- [Social Mobility](#)

Click on a hyperlink to view a topic or
click on the right arrow to proceed through the chapter





Dimensions of Stratification

- **Stratification** is the creation of layers (or strata) of people who possess unequal shares of scarce resources such as income, wealth, power, and prestige.
- Each of the layers in a stratification system is a **social class**—is a segment of a population whose members hold similar amounts of scarce resources and share values, norms, and an identifiable lifestyle.
- Karl Marx and Max Weber made the most significant early contributions to the study of social stratification.



Dimensions of Stratification

- The three dimensions of stratification are **economic, power, and prestige**.
- **Karl Marx** explained the importance of the economic foundations of social classes. According to Marx, those who own and control capital have the power in a society.
- **Max Weber** emphasized the prestige and power aspects of stratification. He argued that while having money certainly helps, economic success and power are not the same.



The Economic Dimension

Karl Marx believed that the economy determined the nature of society. He predicted that capitalist societies would be reduced to two social classes.

- Those who owned the means of production—the **bourgeoisie**—would rule.
- The **proletariat**, those who worked for wages, would be ruled.



Are there extremes of income and poverty in the United States?

- **Income** is the amount of money received by an individual or group over a specific time period.
- **Wealth** refers to all the economic resources held by an individual or group.
- Inequality in income and wealth exists in the United States.



The Power Dimension

Power is the ability to control the behavior of others. It has several bases.

- Money
- Knowledge
- Social Position
- Celebrity



The Prestige Dimension

Prestige comes from recognition, respect, and admiration attached to social positions. It is defined by culture and society.

Americans assign prestige based on the following:

- Wealth
- Power
- Occupation



LEARNING

Match the dimensions of stratifications with the examples below. Use (W) for wealth, (Po) for power, and (Pr) for prestige.

Pr a. the respect accorded doctors

Po b. a politician considering the interests of a lobby

Pr c. the Nobel Peace Prize

W d. stock market holdings

Po e. a Supreme Court ruling

W f. real estate assets

Click the mouse button or press the space bar to display the answers.






Explanations of Stratification

Each of the three perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism—explains stratification in society in a different way.



Functionalist Theory of Stratification

- According to the **functionalist perspective**, stratification assures that the most qualified people fill the most important positions, that these qualified people perform their tasks competently, and that they are rewarded for their efforts.
- Functionalists recognize that inequality exists because certain jobs are more important than others and these jobs often involve special talent and training. To encourage people to make the sacrifices necessary to fill these jobs, society attaches special monetary rewards and prestige to the positions.



Conflict Theory of Stratification

- According to the **conflict theory** of stratification, inequality exists because some people are willing to exploit others.
- Stratification, from this perspective, is based on force rather than on people voluntarily agreeing to it.
 - The conflict theory of stratification is based on Marx's ideas regarding *class conflict*.
 - Later conflict sociologists have proposed that stratification is based more on *power* than on property ownership.



Symbolic Interactionism and Stratification

Symbolic interactionism helps us understand how people are socialized to accept the existing stratification structure.

- According to this perspective, American children are taught that a person's social class is the result of talent and effort.
- People in the lower social classes tend to suffer from lower self-esteem.
- People in the higher social classes tend to have higher self-esteem.



LEARNING

Identify which of the major perspectives describes the examples below.

- a. Corporate executives make more money because they decide who gets what in their organizations.

Conflict Theory

- b. Engineers make more money than butlers because of their education.

Functionalist Theory

- c. Poor children tend to have low self-esteem.

Symbolic Interactionism

Click the mouse button or press the space bar to display the answers.



Social Classes in America

Social classes are changeable and full of exceptions, but sociologists have identified and described several social classes in the United States.

- Upper class
- Upper middle class
- Middle class
- Working class
- Working poor
- Underclass

Typical Occupations		Typical Incomes	
Upper Class	Investors, heirs, chief executive officers	1%	\$1.5 million
Upper Middle Class	Upper-level managers, professionals, owners of medium-sized businesses	14%	\$80,000+
Middle Class	Lower-level managers, semiprofessionals, craftspeople, foremen, non-retail salespeople, clerical	30%	\$45,000
Working Class	Low-skill manual, clerical, and retail sales workers	30%	\$30,000
Working Poor	Lowest-paid manual, retail, and service workers	13%	\$20,000
Underclass	Unemployed, people in part-time menial jobs, people receiving public assistance	12%	\$10,000

The Upper Class

This class includes only one percent of the population, and is divided into the upper-upper class and the lower-upper class.

- At the top is the “aristocracy.” Its members represent the old-money families whose names appear in high society—Ford, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and du Pont, among others. The basis for membership is birth and inherited wealth, and people in this group seldom marry outside their class.
- Members of the lower-upper class may actually be better off financially than the upper-upper class, but often are not accepted into the most exclusive social circles.



The Middle Classes

Although most Americans think of themselves as middle class, only about 40 to 50 percent actually fit this description.

- The upper-middle class (14 percent) is composed of those who have been successful in business, the professions, politics, and the military.
- The middle-middle class (30 percent) include owners of small businesses and farms, some professionals, lower-level managers, and some sales and clerical workers. Their income level is at about the national average.



The Working Class

This group often referred to as lower-middle class, comprises almost 1/3 of the population.

- Working class people include roofers, delivery truck drivers, machine operators, salespeople, and clerical workers.
- In general, their economic resources are lower than those of the middle class.
- Members of the working class have below-average income and unstable employment.
- They generally lack hospital insurance and retirement benefits.
- Members of this group are not likely to enter the middle class.



The Working Poor

Thirteen percent of the population consists of people employed in low-skill jobs with the lowest pay.

- Its members are the lowest-level clerical workers, manual workers (laborers), and service workers (fast-food servers).
- Lacking steady employment, the working poor do not earn enough to rise above the poverty line.



The Underclass

Twelve percent of the population is composed of people who are usually unemployed and who come from families with a history of unemployment for generations.

- These people either work part-time menial jobs (unloading trucks, picking up litter) or are on public assistance.
- The most common shared characteristic of the working poor and the underclass is a lack of skills to obtain jobs that pay enough to meet basic needs.
- There are many routes into the underclass and the working poor class—birth, old age, loss of a marriage partner, lack of education or training, alcoholism, physical or mental disability.





Poverty in America

Poverty in America can be measured in absolute or relative terms. The poor are disproportionately represented by African Americans, Latinos, women, and children.

- **Absolute poverty** is the absence of enough money to secure life's necessities—enough food, a safe place to live, and so forth.
- We measure **relative poverty** by comparing the economic condition of those at the bottom of a society with the economic conditions of other members of that society.

Measuring Poverty

- The United States determines poverty by setting an annual income level. In 2000, it was \$17,050 for a family of four.
- The poor comprise 12.7 percent of the population or more than 34.5 million people, according to a 1999 United States Census Bureau Report.
- Race, ethnicity, gender, and age are all related to poverty.



Responses to the Problem of Poverty

- The War on Poverty was introduced by the federal government in 1964 to help poor people help themselves. This program was not as successful as predicted.
- Social welfare reform has been an ongoing process since 1996.

Welfare Reform

The most recent legislation on welfare reform, enacted in 1996, limits the amount of time those able to work can receive welfare payments. The bill has three major elements: 1) it reduces welfare spending, 2) it increases state and local power to oversee welfare rules, and 3) it adds new restrictions on welfare eligibility.

- A recent major study has shown that the welfare rolls have decreased more dramatically than most predicted.
- Just over seven million people are on welfare, down from over twelve million in 1996.
- Many of those leaving welfare still live in poverty.



LEARNING

Which of the following is NOT one of the major categories of poor people in the United States?

- a. children under age eighteen
- b. able-bodied men who refuse to work
- c. elderly people
- d. people with disabilities
- e. people who live alone or with nonrelatives

Click the mouse button or press the space bar to display the answer.





Social Mobility

Social mobility is the movement of people between social classes.

- **Vertical mobility** occurs when a person's occupation moves upward or downward.
- **Intergenerational mobility** takes place when vertical mobility occurs over a generation.
- **Horizontal mobility** involves changing from one occupation to another at the same social class level.



Upward and Downward Mobility

- **Upward mobility** typically involves a small improvement over one's parents' social class, but it is not always attainable.
- **Downward mobility** results in numerous psychological and social costs.



Caste and Open-Class Systems

The major difference between caste (or closed-class) systems and open-class systems is the extent of vertical mobility.

- The **caste system** allows for is no social mobility because social status is inherited and cannot be changed.
- 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.



LEARNING

Match the major types of social mobility with the examples. Use (IM) for intergenerational mobility, (VM) for vertical mobility, and (HM) for horizontal mobility.

a. a restaurant worker becomes a taxi driver

HM: horizontal mobility

b. an auto worker becomes a manager

VM: vertical mobility

c. the daughter of a hairdresser becomes a college professor

IM: intergenerational mobility

Click the mouse button or press the space bar to display the answers.



Chapter Summary

- Stratification is the division of society into classes that have unequal amounts of wealth, power, and prestige.
- Each of the three perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism—explains stratification in a different way.
- Sociologists have identified several social classes in the United States, including the upper, middle, working, and lower classes.

Continued on next slide.





Chapter Summary

- Poverty can be measured in absolute or relative terms.
- Social mobility is usually measured by changes in occupational status.
- Closed-class systems permit little vertical mobility; open-class systems, such as those in industrialized countries, allow considerable vertical mobility.