

Social Stratification

Social Class

- Defined as a category of people who share a similar socioeconomic position in society.

Aspects of Social Stratification

- Focuses on social inequalities and studies the basic question of who gets what and why
- Related to one's socioeconomic status (SES); may depend on ascribed or achieved status
 - **Ascribed Status:** derives from clearly identifiable characteristics
 - E.g. – age, gender and skin color
 - **Achieved Status:** acquired via direct, individual efforts
 - Obtained through hard work or merit

Class, Status, and Power

- Prestige: amount of positive regard society has for a given person or idea.
- Power: described as the ability to affect others' behavior through real or perceived rewards and punishments.
 - Based on the unequal distribution of resources
 - Defines the relationships between individuals, groups and social institutions.
 - Power relationships function to maintain order, organize economic systems, conduct welfare, and rule over and exploit people
- Marxist Theory: the **proletariat** will overthrow the **bourgeoisie** and the entire capitalist economy by developing class consciousness
 - **Class Consciousness:** organization of the working class around shared goals and recognition of a need for collective political action
 - **False Consciousness:** major barrier to class consciousness. A misperception of one's actual position within society.
 - Proletariat members cannot see how bad conditions are, could not recognize the commonalities between experiences, or were too clouded to assemble into revolutionaries
- Anomie: lack of social norms, or the breakdown of social bonds between an individual and society.
 - Social inequality is accelerated by this and capitalist economies.
- Strain Theory: how anomic conditions can lead to deviance
 - Anomic conditions include excessive individualism, social inequality, and isolation; which leads to an erosion of social solidarity.
- Social trust is important in the proper functioning of civil society. Come from two primary sources:
 - Social norms of reciprocity
 - Social networks
 - Associational ties have diminished and led to a decline in social capital.
 - This is due to society becoming more urbanized, self-centered, and materialistic.

Social Capital

- Considered the investments people make in their society in return for economic or collective rewards
- The greater the investment, the higher the level of **social integration** (peaceful movement into mainstream society) and inclusion.
- Social networks are one of the main form of social capital. Can create two types of inequality: **Situation** (socioeconomic advantage) & **positional** (based on how connected one is within a network)
 - Inequality in networks creates and enforces **privilege**
- Low social capital leads to greater social inequality.
- Cultural Capital: benefits that one receives from knowledge, ability, and skills
- Communities are joined together through small and weak ties.
 - Strong ties: peer group and kinship contacts. Quantifiably small but qualitatively powerful.
 - Weak Ties: social connection that superficial, but there are large number of them
 - Provides wide range of connections to other individuals.
 - Groups without multiple weak ties may find it extremely difficult to contribute to and access social capital

Intersection with Race, Gender, and Age

- Social inequality remains higher among certain disadvantaged groups than others
 - Includes racial and ethnic minorities, female-headed families, and the elderly
- Partially due to **intersectionality**: compounding of disadvantage seen in individuals who belong to more than one oppressed group.
 - May be caused by oversimplification of racial categories or an overreliance on US's **five ethnicities model** (white, black, Latino, American, native American)
 - Racial and ethnic boundaries should be more fluid and ambiguous
 - Argument promotes a hyper diverse state that reimagines the population as a complex, multicultural, mosaic-like mix of national origin, ethnicity, race and immigration status.
 - Can enhance or obstruct social mobility.

Patterns of Social Mobility

- Social Mobility: the ability to acquire higher-level employment opportunities given proper credentials and experience requirements.
 - Typically, the result of economic and occupational structure.

Intergenerational and Intragenerational Mobility

- **Intragenerational** changes in social status happen within a person's lifetime
- **Intergenerational** changes are from parents to children
- Widely believed that America provided ample opportunity for both types of mobility, but the increasing gap between the lower and upper class disputes this thought
- Social inequality is at its highest point in over a century.
 - I.e. Social mobility may not primarily occur in a positive, upward direction

Meritocracy

- Based on intellectual talent and achievement. Means for a person to advance up the social ladder.
- Due to the rising level of social inequality, and concentration of wealth in the US, it is argued that a strong work ethic, conscientious drive, and mastery of skills no longer offer opportunities for advancement.
- Feared that meritocracy in America is becoming a **plutocracy**: rule by the upper class.
- Still plays a key role in sections of society (school), does not directly translate to upward mobility.

Upward and Downward Mobility

- Upward is considered to be a positive change in a person's status, which results in a higher position. Downward mobility is the opposite.
- Higher education does not guarantee upward mobility, but it does help it

Horizontal Mobility

- Vertical Mobility: movement from one social class to another. E.g. – upward/downward social mobility
- Horizontal Mobility: change in occupation or lifestyle that remains within the same social class.

Poverty

- Defined by low SES and lack of possessions or financial resources.

Social Reproduction

- The idea that poverty can be passed down from one generation to the next.
- Culture-of-Poverty explanation: Lifestyle of poverty, powerlessness, isolation and even apathy is handed down from one generation to another as a feature of society.
 - Poverty also depends on other factors such as where one lives, and a present-orientation (not thinking about the future).
- Structural Poverty: theory that is based on the thought that poverty is caused by “holes” in the structure of society.
 - Same individuals do not occupy these holes, but the percentage of society in poverty stays constant.

Absolute and Relative

- Absolute level: poverty is a SES condition in which people do not have enough money, or resources to maintain a quality of living that includes basic life necessities.
- Relative Level: one is poor in comparison to the larger population in which they live.
 - E.g. – a teacher living in upper east side of Manhattan may be considered relatively poor.
- Poverty Line: defined by government calculations for the minimum income requirements for families to acquire the minimum necessities of life.
 - Poverty line is not contextualized according to geographic location
 - Seen as a problem since some places are more expensive to live than others.

- Some believe that poverty is a form of powerlessness or a sociological/psychological condition of hopelessness, indifference, and distrust.
 - Poverty is the result of the inability to control events that shape a person's life.

Social Exclusion

- Can arise from the above sense of powerlessness
- When poor people feel segregated and isolated from society
- This problem can create further obstacles to achieving self-help, independence, and self-respect.
- Disadvantaged groups (like minorities) can experience magnified feelings of alienation and powerlessness when living in an affluent community.
- Similar to anomic conditions (i.e. accelerate social inequality)

Spatial Inequality

- Social stratification across territories and their populations
- Analysis of spatial territory helps to illuminate social inequalities since it attends to how geography influences social processes
 - Gender, ethnicity and race are distributed across space differently
 - Space can channel inequalities or even amplify their effects (especially poverty)
 - E.g. – formation of ghettos and slums
- Social relationships between different agents, such as capitalists, laborers, and government may cause varied social structures, built environments, and unequal regional development.
 - E.g. – poorer neighborhoods have less political and social influence than affluent ones.
 - Results in “undesirable buildings” being located in these areas.

Residential Segregation

- Whether someone resides in an urban, suburban or rural environment, and which neighborhood in that environment they reside in, has a substantial effect on how people interact, cooperate and advance.
- Cultural diversity and anonymity of urban neighborhood usually offers a person a greater range of opportunities as compared to rural communities.
 - E.g. – people are less likely to fall into their occupation due to family ties
 - Tend to have more career options and can more easily improve SES through education, career choice and marriage.
 - These are less available in rural areas.
- Affluent neighborhoods tend to have more homeowners, professions and managers, college graduates, and higher-quality schools.
- Low-income neighborhoods have greater poverty, unemployment rates, lower-quality schools, and higher rates of homelessness.
 - Found to be less safe with higher rates of violent crime, organized crime, & gangs
- Suburbanization: migration pattern of the middle class to suburban communities
 - Suburbs are generally cleaner and less crowded, have lower crime rates, and often have better school systems
 - There is an overall greater concentration of poor individuals in urban centers

- May help to explain increased trend towards suburbanization.
- Members of the lower class are often less able to relocate to areas that might offer better opportunities.
 - Many disadvantaged groups remain in urban centers under poor living conditions
 - Poor living conditions can expose poor to illness and disease
- Urban Decay: previously functional portion of a city deteriorates and becomes decrepit over time.
 - This may be spurred by suburbanization
- Urban Renewal: city land is reclaimed and renovated for public or private use
 - Fueled by **gentrification**: upper- and middle-class population begin to purchase and renovate neighborhoods in deteriorated areas.
 - Displaces low-SES populations.

Environmental Justice

- Poor living conditions and dangerous environmental conditions can result in increased cases of illness and disease in low-SES groups.
- Poor and minority groups tend to reside closer to sites of environmental pollution since these areas usually have cheaper houses.
 - E.g. – hazardous waste producing plants and toxic waste dumps tend to be located in low-income areas with a high concentration of ethnic and racial minorities.
- Combination of inadequate housing, heating and sanitation along with toxin exposure results in increased medical problems.
 - Influenza, pneumonia, substance use disorders, tuberculosis, and whooping cough are much more common in areas with poor living conditions.

Global Inequalities

- World System Theory: categorizes countries and emphasizes the inequalities of the division of labor at the global level.
 - Core Nations: focus on higher skill, and higher-paying production while exploiting **peripheral nations** (lower skilled production)
 - Semi-peripheral nations: work towards becoming core nations, while have many characteristics of peripheral nations
- Social inequalities have increased on a worldwide level as local communities become more subject to the ebb and flow of the global market.
- Globalization has led to increased inequalities in space, food, water, energy, housing and education.
 - Further exacerbated by large population spike that places a strain on the world's resources.
 - Many people around the globe suffer from malnutrition and parasitic and infectious diseases

Epidemiology and Disparities

- Incidence: number of new cases of illness per population at risk in a given amount of time

- Prevalence: measure of the number of cases of an illness overall (whether new or chronic) per population in a given amount of time.
- Morbidity: burden or degree of illness associated with a given disease
- Mortality: refers to deaths caused by a given disease.

Inequities in Health

- Clearly shown that poor environmental and social factors negatively impact health
- Health is dependent on geography, social factors and economic factors.
- Socioeconomic improvements lead to increased general health
 - Best health outcomes are seen in egalitarian societies
- Modern welfare states attempt to eliminate any social differences in health, however a 1980 study showed that class differences in health still exist.
 - Professional groups have longer life expectancy than working-class
 - Second Sickness: exacerbation of health outcomes caused by social injustice
 - Describes the above statistic
- Low income groups are more likely to have poorer health, be uninsured, and die younger than middle/high class adults.
- Poverty, in combination with a culture of inequality, leads to worse health outcomes.
 - Effects runs across age, gender, and racial/ethnic boundaries.
 - Members of lower class are four times more likely to view themselves in worse health as compared to members of affluent class.
 - Much more likely to develop life shortening diseases such as lung cancer, diabetes, heart disease, etc.
 - More likely to commit suicide, and die from homicide.
 - Infant mortality rate is also much higher in some populations

Inequities in Healthcare

- Quality healthcare favors those in higher social classes
- America is one of the few industrialized countries that does not have a healthcare run by a central government.
 - Affordable Care act attempts to address this problem
 - Reduces the overall cost of healthcare, increases coverage and affordability of insurance.
- **Medicare**: covers patients over 65, those with end-stage renal disease, and those with ALS
- **Medicaid**: covers patients who are in significant financial need.
- Some doctors will not accept patients with the above two public insurance programs.
 - Additionally, many doctors will not open up practices in low-income neighborhoods.
 - Thus individuals in lower class are less likely to seek medical attention at overcrowded clinics.
- Primary reasons that low-income groups have higher mortality rates:
 - Poor access to quality medical care
 - Poor nutrition
 - Feeling less in control of life circumstances.

- Poor are more likely to smoke, be overweight and are less likely to engage in physical activity
- Minorities and low-income groups tend to face greater barriers to care and poorer quality of care when they receive it.
 - Culture and non-native language barriers act as obstacles to diagnosis and treatment.
- Other characteristics may have an impact on how patients are treated:
 - Obese patients are less likely to be recommended an effective weight loss program since an inaccurate assumption may be made that they lack the will power to lose weight.
 - Less likely to keep a consistent doctor due to poor relations
 - Less likely to have quality preventative care and screenings.
 - Women tend to be favored by health care system.
 - More likely to be insured, and utilize services more than men.
 - Receive more services per visit than men do
 - Healthcare visits are most likely more common among women due to their higher morbidity rates.
 - However, women are more likely to be delayed or unable to obtain necessary medical care, dental care, and prescription medicines
 - LGBT men and women are still heavily discriminated against due to remaining prejudices and homophobia.