

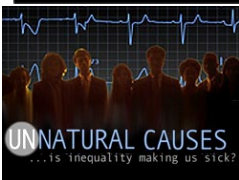


John Maier, Jr. / The Image Works

Social Stratification and Life Chances

Discussion:

- **What is social stratification fundamentally about?**
- **What are life chances and how are they related to social stratification?**



Part 1: In Sickness and in Wealth

How were these themes of social stratification and life chances evident in the film we saw before break?



Discussion “In Sickness and In Wealth”

- **The U.S. ranks 30th among nations in life expectancy. How can that be explained?**
- **What does the film argue is the most important determinant of health?**
- **What are the social mechanisms that account for this?**
- **Can the effects of inequality be mitigated?**
- **What lessons can we draw from other countries?**

Core Concepts 1-3

- Social stratification and life chances
- Two main bases of social stratification
- Place matters...at all levels
- Vast inequality exists both between and within countries



Gini Index

An important measure of inequality within countries

It measures the proportion of total income that would have to be redistributed in order to reach complete equality

http://www.nationmaster.com/red/graph/eco_dis_of_fam_inc_gin_ind-distribution-family-income-gini-index&b_printable=1

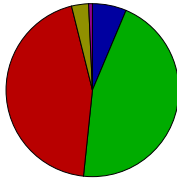
Core Concepts 4-5 Caste and Class Systems

- ascribed vs. achieved statuses
- a continuum
- mobility (know the different types)
- what kind of mobility tends to occur in caste systems?
- How does the United States fit into this discussion?

Modeling the Class Structure

CLASS? -- If you were asked to use one of four names for your social class, which would you : lower class, the working class, the middle class, or the upper class? (CLASS)

	Freq.	%
1) LOWER	191	6.4
2) WORKING	1354	45.3
3) MIDDLE	1331	44.5
4) UPPER	95	3.2
8) DONT KNOW	19	0.6
9) NO ANSWER	2	0.1
TOTAL (N)	2992	100.0
Missing	1518	



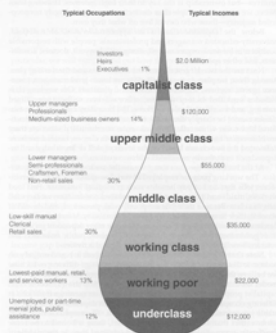
Is this an etic or an emic perspective on class?

Note: Data are from the 2006 General Social Survey (GSS)

The Gilbert-Kahl model of the U.S. Class Structure

What are this models pros and cons?

FIGURE 1-1 Gilbert-Kahl Model of the Class Structure



Introduction to Sociology

Some Background Facts: Poverty in the United States

- Poverty level set in early 1960s—adjusted for inflation since then, but not adjusted for rising incomes of rest of the population
- For 2007: 12.5% of the population, 37.3 million people, below the poverty line of \$21,203 for a family of four.
- 70% of people below the poverty line are white, 25% are black, 4% Asian/Pacific Islanders, about 1% Native American
- The poverty rate for African Americans is 25%; for Hispanics, 22%; for Asians, 10%, and for Non-Hispanic Whites, 8%
- A little over half of families in poverty are female-headed
- Children under 18 have by far the highest poverty rate of any age group (close to 20%)
- The geography of poverty is changing: suburban poor now outnumber urban poor. And 48 of 50 counties with highest child poverty rates are rural (Ferrante, p. 226)

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A note about Core Concept 6 and Herbert Gans' "Functions of Poverty"



Compare Ferrante (p. 210) with what Gans actually said:

"A functional analysis must conclude that poverty persists not only because it fulfills a number of positive functions but also because many of the functional alternatives to poverty would be quite dysfunctional for the affluent members of society. A functional analysis thus ultimately arrives at much the same conclusion as radical sociology... that phenomena like poverty can be eliminated only when they become dysfunctional for the affluent or powerful, or when the powerless can obtain enough power to change society."

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Explaining Inequality:

The Functionalist Theory of Social Stratification

- *Occupations vary in functional importance for society—it matters who fills them*
- *These functionally-important positions generally require sacrifice to acquire the necessary training and talents*
- *Unequal rewards are society's way of getting individuals to make these sacrifices*
- *Therefore social stratification (the unequal distribution of rewards) is necessary and functional for society*

Discussion

- *What criticisms could be made of this theory?*
- *What might an alternative explanation of inequality look like?*



Explaining Inequality:

Conflict Theories of Social Stratification

- *Challenge the concept of functional importance and the assumption of "sacrifice"*
- *Suggest that social stratification may block both the development and recognition of talent*
- *Argue that existing levels of inequality are products of differences in power, not social necessity*
- *Emphasize the social costs of high inequality*

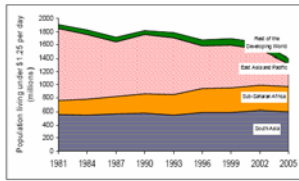
Global Inequality

- **Immanuel Wallerstein and world system theory: a stratified world of core, semi-periphery and periphery**
- **A world in which 25% (1.4 billion) of the world's population lives below the absolute poverty line (\$1.25 a day) and almost 40% (2.6 billion) lives below the \$2.00 relative poverty line (World Bank calculations, recently revised)**



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Figure 2: Numbers of poor by region 1981-2005



Source: World Bank briefing note

- The absolute poverty rate in East Asia has fallen from nearly 80% in 1961 to 18% by 2005
- The number of poor almost doubled in sub-Saharan Africa between 1981-2005 and poverty rates there are now around 50%

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Strategies to Reduce Global Poverty

- *Foreign Aid (the U.S. gives less than any other rich country except Portugal)*
- *Trade Concessions (the Doha Round of World Trade Organization talks collapsed in 2008). Policies of developed countries definitely hold countries back.*
- *Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), e.g. microcredit programs*
- *But successful government policies both to use and to manage globalization have probably been the most important factor*
