

Social Structure and Social Change (14068)

-Groups 86, 87 & 49-

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This course introduces students to the major contemporary theories and the central concepts relevant to the study of social stratification, with particular attention to the study of advanced industrial societies. It presents some of the key findings from the comparative literature on social stratification and shows how theoretical debates can be tested against empirical data. The course offers a comprehensive introduction to key debates in the field of social stratification, including debates on meritocracy, the declining significance of social class, the causes of income polarisation, and the determinants of gender and ethnic stratification in contemporary societies.

Objectives

The course objectives are:

- 1) to give students a good knowledge of the academic literature and debates about social stratification in advanced contemporary societies;
- 2) to give empirically-based knowledge of the ways in which social structures vary across contemporary advanced societies;
- 3) to enable students to understand how contemporary stratification theories can be tested against the empirical evidence;
- 4) to introduce students to theories of social change by looking at changes in the social structures of advanced industrial societies;
- 5) to enable students to understand how social scientists make sense of the complexity of social phenomena by combining theory and empirical research;
- 6) to understand the role played by labour-markets, households and welfare states in the production/reproduction of inequality;
- 7) to introduce students to the complexities of measuring (class, income, gender and ethnic) inequality
- 8) to introduce students to some key concepts and debates in the study of social behaviour, including the role of preferences vs. constraints, biological vs. environmental influences, socialization vs. agency;
- 9) to understand the differences between micro, meso and macro levels of analysis;
- 10) to understand the difference between demand and supply-side theories of gender and ethnic stratification;

Competences to be achieved in the subject

- 1) Ability to analyse and synthesize different approaches to the study of inequality
- 2) Familiarity with the basic conceptual framework of social stratification research
- 3) Ability to identify the main arguments of a scientific text
- 4) Critical thinking

- 5) Ability to present orally in English
- 6) Cooperation and communication with fellow students

Teaching Arrangements

The course is divided into 12 lectures and 12 practical sessions where students will be asked to discuss readings and visual materials, as well as to carry out various practical exercises and assignments.

Assessment

The final grade will depend on two major components:

- 1) Practical sessions, (presentations, participation, readings and assignments): 40%
- 2) Exam^{**}: 60%

^{**}The exam combines a battery of multiple-choice (accounting for 60% of the total grade) with two open essay-type questions (40%).

NOTE: This evaluation methodology can be subjected to changes depending on the number of students.

Language of the course

English

Course Outline (*provisional—subjected to changes as the course progresses*)

Lesson-1

Introduction

Some key concepts: What is structure? What is change? Power, Resources, Inequality, Exploitation, Life-Chances

The origins of stratification theory (I): Karl Marx

Practical Session -1

Marx's Theory of Economic Recessions

Class viewing *Masters of Money: Marx*

“BBC Economics Editor Stephanie Flanders examines one of the most revolutionary and controversial thinkers of all. Karl Marx's ideas left an indelible stamp on the lives of billions of people and the world we live in today. As the global financial crisis continues on its destructive path, some are starting to wonder if he was right... Stephanie [...] asks what answers does Marx provide to the mess we are all in today.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3GVB14nkRE>

Lesson -2

The origins of stratification theory (II): Max Weber

Class and Status in Weber

Marx and Weber: Similarities and differences

Practical session -2

Marx and Weber: Similarities and Differences

1. Readings:

- a. Marx, C. and Engles, F. 1848. *The Communist Manifesto* (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>)
- b. Weber, M. 1922. *Science as a Vocation*
- c. Wright, E.O. 2000. "The Shadow of Exploitation in Weber", Read all but focus on Section 1 "Weber and Marx on Class: Convergences" pp. 1-13
- d. Wright, E.O. 2000. "The Shadow of Exploitation in Weber", Read all but focus on Section 2 "Weber and Marx on Class: Central Differences" pp. 13-21

Task: Texts are randomly assigned. Presentation: summarize the main ideas of the assigned text. Discussion in class: confront a) and b) and c) and d).

** Certain passages of this text can be hard follow. Weber's position on value neutrality is nicely explained in this link: <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/undergraduate/introsoc/weber6.html>

2. Class viewing *Marx's Theory of Economic Crisis* by Cliff Bowman (10m) (time permitting) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-e8rt8RGjCM> . Open discussion

Lesson-3

Introducing Contemporary Class Schemas: Erik Olin Wright and John Goldthorpe

How many classes are there?

The problem of the middle classes

Concepts and operationalization

Olin Wright and Goldthorpe: Differences and similarities

Practical session -3

1. Readings:

- a. Breen, R. 2005. "A Weberian Approach to Class Analysis" in Erik Olin Wright (ed.) *Alternative Foundations of Class Analysis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 31-50.
- b. Tahlin, M. 2007. "Class Clues". *European Sociological Review*, 23(5): 557-572.

Task: Class presentation, debate and exercises (t.b.a.)

2. Class discussion: *What does a 1940s comic have to do with class theory? The parable of the Shmoos*

- c. The Michigan Daily, "What a shmoo can teach us about class conflict", by Nick Woormer, Published November 14, 2001

<https://www.michigandaily.com/content/what-shmoo-can-teach-us-about-class-conflict>

Lesson -4

Class Mobility: An Introduction, key concepts and major debates

Marxist and Liberal theories of inequality and change

Introducing the mobility table

Absolute vs relative mobility rates, social fluidity and the odds ratio

Practical session-4

Mobility Exercise: The mobility table

Discussion

Lesson -5

Comparative Research on Social Mobility

Theories about cross-national variation in mobility patterns

The CASMIN project and beyond

What we know and what we don't: A review of the main findings

Practical session-5

Readings:

1. Kohn, M. L. 1987. "Cross-National Research as an Analytic Strategy". *American Sociological Review*, 52:713-731.
2. Ishida, H., Mueller, W. and Ridge, J. M. (1995) "Class Origin, Class Destination and Education: A Cross-National Study of Ten Industrial Nations". *American Journal of Sociology*, 101:145-193.
3. Breen, R. 2010. "Educational Expansion and Social Mobility in the Twentieth Century" *Social Forces*, 89(2): 365-88.

Task: Texts are randomly assigned. Summarize the main ideas of the assigned text.

Comparing different approaches. Discussion in class.

Lesson -6

Educational attainment and the meritocracy debate

The OED triangle

Liberal and related theories of meritocracy

Cross-national trends in educational stratification (I)

Practical session -6

Class viewing *Educational System in Finland*

Education expert from Harvard Tony Wagner travels to Finland, a country that has the highest performing education system in the world.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZnCK77VGTw>)

Lesson -7

Educational stratification II

Cross-national trends II

Increasing meritocracy? Where? Why?

Mechanisms: Primary and Secondary Effects of Class

Practical session 7

The meritocracy debate

Readings:

1. Saunders, P. 1996 "Might Britain be a Meritocracy?" *Sociology*, 29(1): 23-41.
2. Breen, R. and Goldthorpe, J.H. 1999. "Class Inequality and Meritocracy: A Critique of Saunders and an Alternative Analysis". *British Journal of Sociology*, 50:1-27.

Texts are randomly assigned. Summarize the main ideas of the assigned text. Compare different approaches. Discussion in class.

In-class reading:

"Lazy Rich Kids Are As Successful As Overachieving Underprivileged Kids"

<http://www.babypost.com/blogs/baby-buzz/lazy-rich-kids-are-successful-overachieving-underprivileged-kids>

Task: Reframe today's discussion using the concepts of primary and secondary effects

Lesson -8

Investigating Primary Effects: Ability and Inequality

Types of Ability: Cognitive and non-cognitive abilities

The Transmission of ability: Mechanisms and debates

The importance of early intervention: The Perry Preschool Project

Practical Session -8

Readings.

Duncan G.J., Magnuson, K. and Vortuba-Drzal, E. 2014. "Boosting Family Income to Promote Child Development". *The Future of Children*, 24(1):99-120.

In-class reading:

The Economist 2011.

"The economics of good looks: The line of beauty"

<http://www.economist.com/node/21526782>

Discussion: Is it meritocratic that good-looking people earn higher wages?

Lesson -9

Income Inequality

Measuring income inequality

Economic Development and Income Inequality

Poverty: What is it and how to measure it

Practical Session -9

A global perspective on inequality

1. Readings

- a. Milanovic, B. 2012. "Global Income Inequality by the Numbers: in History and Now" <http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/pdf/10.1596/1813-9450-6259>

Task: Class presentation and debate

2. Class viewing:

New Insights on Poverty (19m)

"Researcher Hans Rosling uses his cool data tools to show how countries are pulling themselves out of poverty. He demos Dollar Street, comparing households of varying income levels worldwide. Then he does something really amazing." A 19m talk produced by TED talks series, the video will be shown in class. Exercises will follow

http://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_reveals_new_insights_on_poverty/transcript?language=en

New Thoughts on Capital in the Twenty-First Century (21m)

"French economist Thomas Piketty caused a sensation in early 2014 with his book on a simple, brutal formula explaining economic inequality: $r > g$ (meaning that return on capital is generally higher than economic growth). Here, he talks through the massive data set that led him to conclude: Economic inequality is not new, but it is getting worse, with radical possible impacts."

http://www.ted.com/talks/thomas_piketty_new_thoughts_on_capital_in_the_twenty_first_century

Lesson-10

Gender Stratification

The Labour-Market Participation of Women

Occupational gender segregation: Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions

The Wage gap: Explained and Unexplained components

Time trends and international comparisons

Practical session- 10

Debate: Is the gender wage gap a myth?

1. Class viewing:

Do Women earn less than men?"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwogDPh-Sow&NR=1&feature=endscreen>

Task: Refute the arguments put forward by Profesor Horowitz's drawing on what you have learnt from Lesson 10

Lesson 11

Explaining gender differences in Labour-Market behaviour

Demand-side theories: Discrimination and social closure

Supply-side theories: Preferences and Rational calculations, Socialization and social learning

Practical session -11

1. Class viewing *Television's Impact on the Status of Women in India*
"Emily Oster, Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago Department of Economics, talks about her research on the impact of television on women in rural". 10m <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsQHpgSxA1o>
<http://www.chicagobooth.edu/capideas/apr09/3.aspx> Followed by discussion
2. A guided tour around inequality databases: *OECD, LIS, Eurostat, the World Bank and The Gap Minder*

Lesson-12

Ethnic stratification: An introduction to concepts, findings and debates

Main concepts- Race, Ethnicity, Categorization, Segregation. Assimilation, Integration or Incorporation? Ethnic gaps: Differences, penalties or discrimination?

Ethnic penalties in the labour market: main findings and explanations

Ethnic differences in educational attainment: main findings and explanations

Practical session- 12

Racial prejudice and processes of racial categorization

1. Class viewing:
Minding the racial wage gap
"Kerwin Kofi Charles, Steans Family Professor at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy, speaks on research conducted by him and Jonathan Guryan on the Role of prejudice in black wages." 10m
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N38XrQ6x7ck>

Changing Race by Changing Clothes

"An interdisciplinary team of researchers from Tufts University, Stanford University and the University of California, Irvine has found that the perception of race can be altered by cues to social status as simple as the clothes a person wears. Far from being a straightforward "read out" of facial features, say the researchers, racial categorization represents a complex and subtle process powerfully shaped by context and the stereotypes and prejudices we already hold". <http://vimeo.com/29493847>

Short Documentary - Eye Of The Storm 26m

"This documentary explores the nature of prejudice in a dramatic third-grade classroom experiment conducted in a small Midwestern town, a town without ghettos, blacks, or campus unrest. It demonstrates how quickly wholesome,

friendly schoolchildren can be infected with the ugly virus of discrimination that leads to frustration, broken friendships, and vicious behavior. Host and narrator is Bill Buetel of ABC News" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjSHOaugO-0>

Using experiments to research discrimination: The GEMM project

2. In-class readings

- a. Gneezy, U. and Rustichini A. “Gender and competition at a young age”
<http://www.chicagobooth.edu/capideas/sept04/gendercompetition.html>
- b. “Blind auditions key to hiring musicians” *Princeton Weekly Bulletin*
<https://www.princeton.edu/pr/pwb/01/0212/7b.shtml>

Split the class into two groups and assign one reading to each. Summarize the experiments and discuss.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS

GENERAL

Marshall, Gordon. 1998. *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford University Press.

Platt, Lucinda. 2011. *Understanding Inequalities*. Polity Press

Grusky, David B., ed. 2001. *Social Stratification. Class, Race, and Gender in Sociological Perspective*. 2nd Ed., Boulder CO: Westview Press.

CLASS

Crompton, Rosemary, 1998. *Class and Stratification: An Introduction to Current Debates*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Lee, David and Turner, Bryan (eds). 1996. *Conflicts about Class: Debating Inequality in Late Industrialism*. London: Longman

Marshall, Gordon. 1997. *Repositioning Class. Social Inequality in Industrial Societies*. London: Sage

GENDER

Blau, F. Ferber, M and Winkler, A. 2001. *The Economics of Women, Men and Work* (3d Edition). London: Prentice Hall (especially chapters 5, 6, 7 and 11)

ETHNIC MINORITIES

Heath, A F and S Y Cheung (eds) (2007) *Unequal Chances: Ethnic Minorities in Western Labour Markets*. Proceedings of the British Academy 137. Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy.

RACE

Massey, Douglas and Nancy Denton, 1998. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. (2nd Ed.). Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.