

Social stratification

[Politics](#), [Marxism](#)



Social Stratification can be seen everywhere around us from our schools to government agencies to even our homes. Social Stratification refers to the placement of people in society into a hierarchical arrangement. It is an actual part of our social system that represents the differentiation of opportunities that we receive in our everyday lives. The idea of hierarchy emerged in the 17th and 18th century by sociologist Hobbes and Locke and it was through these sociologists that people realized that inequality existed in the society. There are different forms of Social Stratification that exist in our societies namely; caste societies — in this society person's status is attributed to them at birth and not by their accomplishments, class society - in this society person's status is attributed to them by the accomplishments they have achieved, classless society — this is a society where there is no status, a true classless society does not exist. For the purpose of this paper class and caste societies will be analyzed. In this paper four major points of necessity of Social Stratification will be analyzed and criticized to form a conclusion as to whether Social Stratification is a necessary phenomenon or not. The four points are: * Social Stratification allows people who have accomplished varying ability and wealth to function in ways that are appropriate for them. * Social Stratification facilitates stability and equilibrium * Social Stratification impacts on material as well as non-material aspects of life * Social Stratification assist wealthier countries to remain wealthy

1. Social Stratification allows people who have accomplished varying ability and wealth to function in ways that are appropriate for them. This is a functionalist perspective supported by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore. They started by pointing out that “ no society is classless or unstratified”[]

These sociologists explain that in order for a society to function smoothly the most qualified persons should fill the most functional positions in society and once these roles have been filled the respective persons should perform their duties and should be rewarded correctly with high income and prestige. If the duties, ability or talent associated with each job were equally the same to all in society then there would not be a problem of inequality and the social problem that is created would be greatly reduced. However, in today's society it makes a great difference who are appointed to what position, as some positions are more inherent and require special talents and training also some are more functional than others. In this way we see how rewards are distributed differentially according to positions giving rise to social stratification. These rewards that are distributed contribute sustenance and comfort to a job also not forgetting the idea of self respect and ego expansion. For example, a doctor is rewarded with high income and prestige because of his many years of studies and long period of training unlike a janitor, whose job is socially important but does not require a high level of intelligence or long period of training so it is not rewarded as highly as the doctor; and this example shows clearly what sociologists Davis and Moore were explaining when they said that people who have accomplished varying ability and wealth should be treated appropriately. Many sociologists have criticized this perspective including Tumin who explained that Davis and Moore disregarded social factors as discrimination. They explained that there is a lot of tension that can arise in society because of inequality. For example, there are persons in society that work hard and are not treated appropriately and are not rewarded fairly for their efforts. Furthermore, other

sociologist like Wrong, explained that Davis and Moore disregarded those that inherited their wealth and position. Some persons are born into privileges; they have not worked and earned anything. Also, some persons use their position and contacts to secure and improve their own position and give functional positions to friends and family who sometimes are not properly qualified or trained e. g. politicians. Critics also say that those persons with the highly rewarded positions do not necessarily fill the most important positions in society. The poor usually have socially important jobs, without some of these jobs done society would not be the same.

2. Social Stratification facilitates stability and equilibrium

The idea that Social Stratification exists all around us in society gives rise to the fact that it must serve a purpose. The purpose that is being referred to here is that social stratification facilitates stability and equilibrium. In complex organizations there must be some level of hierarchy. Hierarchy is important as it provides workers with clearly defined job roles and also job roles of other employees which are important in getting the job done in today's society. This results in equilibrium of the firm thus equilibrium of the society as a whole. However, sociologists have criticized this perspective saying that it is being assumed that social stratification is necessary for the smooth functioning of the society and it should be assumed that a system cannot function without hierarchy. Likely, some sociologist explains that this approach " supports the status quo of existing systems" [] that is while social stratification may facilitate stability in society there is not valid arguments to support it to the end.

3. Social Stratification impacts on material as well as non-material aspects of life. This perspective deals with an issue we might not

immediately recognize if we do not sit down to think about. Many sociologists agree that Social Stratification impacts on material as well as non material aspects of our lives. For example: It impacts on our health such as health care, coping with stress and living conditions (Crawford1986, Pearlin 1989, Ross and Wu 1995, etal). Social Stratification impacts on our access to quality education (DiMaggio 1982) which in turn will impact on income. It impacts on our political affiliation thus our voting patterns (Erikson, Luttbeg and Tedin 2000). It also plays a part in our family lives as the chores are not divided equally (Bott 1971). It impacts on our child care arrangements (Capizzano, Tout and Adams 2000). It impacts on the likelihood of arrest, conviction and imprisonment (Reiman 1998). It even go as extreme as impacting on whether we live or die, a good example of this is provided by the movie Titanic, 60% of the survivors were holders of first class tickets

4. Social Stratification provides wealthier countries to remain wealthy. While by reading the statement of this perspective it sound bias it is not really so. This perspective follows the Dependency theory which states that “ wealthy countries of the world need a peripheral group of poorer countries to remain wealthy. “[] The wealthy countries have the technology to manufacture goods while the poorer countries have the natural resources , so the profit works in both ways. However, the theory suggests that the wealthy countries are stripping the poorer countries of their natural resources and forcing them to buy the manufactured goods at high prices which results in the wealthy countries maintain superiority. Karl Marx along with his collaborator Freidrich Engels further explained this perspective but in terms of individuals rather than countries. Marx stated that society is

divided into two classes, the dominant class being those that control the means of production and the subordinate class those who provide labour. The subordinate class is the class that is exploited by paying high taxes and working long hours for little pay. He explains that this is the social relationship that people enter to obtain food, clothing and other goods for the necessity of life. Marx argued that it goes beyond the economic aspect; the law is also designed to protect the interests of the dominant class. Marx believed that the subordinate class would eventually be able to overthrow the dominant class, but the dominant class eventually improved workers' conditions and salary so it was prevented.

5. Social Stratification depends on the distribution of three main resources: wealth, power and prestige — Max Weber Unlike Marx, Weber was concerned with the meanings people attach to their actions in different social contexts.