

Essay on dimensions of social inequality

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



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Abstract

Social inequality is simply how different categories of individuals are prescribed by the society. The society uses basic characteristics such as gender, sex, education, and ethnicity among other factors in order to categorize an individual. The social inequalities determine the access to limited goods such as market labor force, education, health care facilities, and other forms of participation in the society. Different forms of social inequalities are constructs of geographical distribution, and status within the country, however, cultural aspects, mostly integrated with cultural identities, of society are perceived to be the major contributor of social inequality. Discourses have, therefore, been raised on whether the poor deserve to be poor or not and whether the rich deserve to be rich or not. In order to address this question, I examined different dimensions of social inequalities in my life such as social class, educational level, and race among other factors. In this paper, I will also try to bring out understanding of different

theories in attempt to explain social stratification. A comparison will be done between different perspectives through interviews and my own perspective of social inequalities. In essence all factors discussed in this paper show a link between social inequalities and different factors such as economic and political system. Trends such as widening inequalities among the groups are associated with low standards of national cohesion and patriotism in the society. It is for these reasons that the patterns of social inequalities need to be understood from an individual perspectives.

The society I live in has become more complex with different changes from different regions. Such changes have categorized people by giving them a high or low social status in terms of political power as well as economic resources. I am an American belonging to the middle class in the society with respect to the hierarchy established in social stratification. I was born in a not very wealthy as well as not very poor family. Throughout my life, achievements have not been the easier way or the tough way. I have acquired basic academic skills that are needed in the employment sector; however, is more or less what can be achieved by individuals born in rich families. I am an African American; this might have played a role in determining race and ethnicity as social inequality in my life. Differentiation according to race has existed whereby White Americans are inclined to opportunities compared to some of us who have the black identity in them. It follows that these phenomenon only indicate how social stratification move from one generation to the next and how they are consistent in such generations. That is to say it is more likely to remain poor if your generation is poor whereas there is a possibly of remaining rich when you are ascribed

to rich families. Social inequalities, to me, are prospects of the society rather than an individual case. My education level has enabled me gain economic status that is above the poor and below the rich that can be regarded as strive to change my position in the class hierarchy.

In America, power is regarded by the political class as the most prestigious element of social stratification. This shows how the American society in comparison to other societies displays their social inequalities. The class system in America categorizes individuals in terms of their skin colors, sex, and socially ascribed background. However, in terms of political system, I consider myself to have gained adequate political rights as well as equal representation in the law. My educational achievements have also been gained based on merit depending on how well I perform in classes. To me, meritocracy has been above economic prowess and diffuses the notion of family dependence and overreliance on different groupings. Being in middle class has exposed me to positive life chances and I have gained more benefits to it than disbenefits. My meritocracy functions are derived from the social stratifications that operate between societal inequalities. According to Cullen and Novick in Davis-Moore theory of social stratification (1979) my social life and how it's stratified in American society has borne different consequences that are either beneficial or non beneficial. For example, being a middle class individual, I have been in the midst of battling with poverty as I strive to achieve upper social class usually with sympathy to the people of low class (the poor). Questions remain on why the society must stratify people in different ways. What could be some of the advantages and disadvantages of such classifications? Davis-Moore draws a thesis that is

mainly concerned with meritocracy. He argues that society is stratified to create different functional positions. According to him merits are used to reward individuals who are attached to class importance. Social stratification is then used to promote ways of production in terms of encouraging individuals to work harder to achieve a certain class (Cullen and Novick, 1979). According to proponents of social stratification, the system of inequalities rewards certain individuals while others benefit the whole society. Looking at my own experience on the opportunities presented by different races and ethnicity, it is easier to agree with scholars like Marx Weber as well as Karl Marx that social stratification gives certain individuals more opportunities over others. Just like economic differences that I see between upper social class, middle, and low class so does Marx argument on capitalism. He argues that capitalism is wheeled from inequalities such as power as well as wealth. People who have power in society have always used the power to oppress the less wealthy individuals like us. Marx also maintains that inequalities in opportunities are passed from one generation to the next (Weber, 1978). I concur with this argument based on the experiences and situations I encountered during my life in elementary school. There was objective class difference as children from rich families would mix in elegant/elite schools. It is through such learning environment that they develop elitism hence creating ties that are beneficial in the future. However, individuals from middle class like me will mix in basic schools which translate to meeting individuals from your own social class. These differences in social class present differences in opportunities. Based on Marx argument on capitalist society, it is evident that this kind of society is

capable of creating a class system that transcends to every new generation. According to Marx, daily activities in the society are left in the hands of upper class whose lives are based on high standards of living. " People from upper class, contrary to my state of living, are involved in white collar jobs and don't regard themselves as the industrial proletariat, however, middle class and the low class individuals are still involved in manual labor despite the level of education one may possess" (Weber, 1978).

American society may be using different social dimensions to classify people in order to create different organizations. Such inequalities are regarded by people like Marx to be essential in maintaining harmony between workers without necessarily interfering with capitalism aspects in the society. The society might also be using these dimensions of social inequalities to for an extension of legal aspects in the society especially among the workers who are associated with low class. According to Marx Weber, social inequalities are embedded in two models; social inequality and social status. To him social inequality was mainly caused by difference in class status and power. Marx considers issues of social ranking as nemesis of industrial societies that do not hold any clear definition in its functionality. He also regards differentiation in terms of economic status as a composite of inequalities in the society (Weber, 1978). The stratification, therefore, presents a variable that is both complex and incomprehensible. In his analysis of different societies from hunters and gatherers, agrarian societies, to industrial societies, he asserts that technology that plays the role of facilitating more production merely fuels stratification based on inequalities. It is for this reason that agrarian society exercises power over the hunters and gatherers

while the industrial societies exercise power over agrarian communities. Different argument from Marx and Davis Moore depicts that society's stratification is where individuals are able to strive in order to amass resources that are used to gain positions over racism, class, as well as constraints faced by both. Economic resources are unequally distributed in different classes. This raises questions on how social class is used to maintain power and monopolize over resources. I have experienced situations in which black Americans have been the subject of unfair mortgage ownership. Blacks have been subjected to less mortgage investments which have led to less accumulation of wealth. This translates that people like us will continue being below the upper social class. I have also experienced situations on how our education systems have also influenced social stratification. Poor performance in school would mean lack of skills in order to be absorbed in the job market. It is also believed that different schools equip students with different skills whereby elite schools are regarded to have high skills while low class schools have low skills necessary in the job market. These aspects have been responsible for differences in labor force that in turn create difference in class. However, " Pierre Bourdieu brings a different perspective of cultural capital and how different dimensions of social inequalities are used to create social stratification in the society" (Bourdieu, 1990). He asserts that upper class individuals to an extent have developed a cultural system that is highly valued compared to the cultural capital of lower classes. Perhaps this is the reason why scholars like Marx and Davis Moore talks of different advantages based on different social status. The fact that I ascribe to middle class can be

best explained in Bourdieu aspects of how people find themselves in different social classes. For Bourdieu (1990), habitus is the main factor as people tend to develop careers that resemble their own class and choose cultural activities belonging to their class. Perhaps the concept of Bourdieu will be important in analyzing the contrast between the interviewee and my own situation in the following sections

Interviews

This section focuses on the interviews of two individuals who have different dimensions of social inequalities. One of the interviewee has the following attributes. He is a male, black who lives in US, and is homosexual/gay. The individual works in unskilled labor farm which translates to low labor prestige. Throughout the interview, the first interview will assume the name BA. The second interviewee is an Asian lady from china who stays in America among the alien population. The lady faces issues of deportation and has since been investigated at her workplace. The lady has low education level since alien students are not granted same opportunities as those of Native Americans/White Americans. She is a heterosexual. The lady will assume the name CA throughout the interview. Interview questions administered to the two are more or less the same rather targeting different answers.

Interviewer: BA, several case studies suggests that race and ethnicity is a great cultural concern in the American society in industries, schools, as well as workplace. How is being black affected your opportunities and the life chances in the aforementioned institutions? Again, issues of gayism have attracted different public debates in the recent past in American society. What aspects of your life does it affect?

BA: The issue of race appears to be logical in US in terms of how it places people above different opportunities. I have stayed in America for close to 20 years and amassed vast experiences in different dimensions of social inequalities, and how these attributes have impacted into my life chances. More black people join colleges in US and industries to seek for employment currently than ever before, but still there are consistencies of social inequalities. The inequalities to me have been based on sex segregation as well as race discrimination. Individuals who are gay like me have been denied the opportunities and chances in life to manage issues in either business positions or administrative institutions. Most schools fail to admit students who are gay. Blacks have been segregated in schools meant for blacks from elite schools. Being a black I have been denied different opportunities in the employment sector even after finishing college with claims that blacks do not possess both technical and scientific skills. In my opinion, race and ethnicity as dimensions of social inequalities plays a significant role in opportunity structure in societies with strict social stratification. Race, ethnicity, and rare traditional social dimensions like sexual orientation play significant role in social inequalities.

Interviewer: In your own opinion CA, how do you think being Asian origin and alien in US has affected your life chances and the opportunities? Is being in US presents a double face to your life prospects and ambitions?

CA: It is no doubt that class differences based on social inequalities such as race and ethnicity exists in US. Being Asian alien in America, I have less chances of securing admission in US colleges. The DREM Act that is supposed to be addressing concerns of alien populations has failed several

attempts of its enactment in congress. Even in cases where I have secured a job, there have been government instructions to audit employment information in order to determine race, ethnicity, and citizenship status. At different circumstances I have been threatened with deportation. Even with basic education level, we are still being regarded as less skilled. This demonstrates social stratification in American society. The poor deserve to be poor and the rich deserve to be rich. Lack of job opportunities mean that the poverty deepens. The gap between the rich and the poor continue to widen.

Interview analysis

There are differences from the interview session between BA, CA as well as from my own perspective. These individuals perceive their social inequalities to be offering more disadvantages than advantages in this society. The fact that race, ethnicity, level of education denies them different opportunities are different from my situation. Perhaps being black American gave me some little opportunities above them. However, individuals seem to have different expectation. The blacks think that there would be racial equality while the Asian expects that DREAM Act will position them in the opportunity structure. However, both of them feel that there is discrimination in terms of social stratification. This limits the investment opportunities which ought to have elevated them to a better position. I consider these different attributes that Bourdieu refer to as habitus as important element in the integration of the three of us. There is a possibility that coming together between the blacks, Asians, and black Americans would call for policy change in the government in order to better our life chances.

The future

This section examines the changing patterns of inequalities in individual's lives. Complete understanding of changing trends and the nature of the society will help contain emerging issues of social inequalities such as social and political instability. In the next 20 years, differences in economy among the poor and the rich will continue to widen. There will be extremes of wealth as well as poverty. The social mobility in American society will continue to develop in opposite directions between the upper class and the lower class. This might stem from differences in the business environment as well as political scenes. For these reason, it is evident that inequalities might continue to persist since there are no adequate strategies to address them. In 20 years time the likes of BA, CA, and I are likely to remain at the same position. Analyzing Bourdieu argument on different values accrued to cultural capital might be the reason why extremes will still persist even in the next generation. This is because one cultural capital is valued than the other (Bourdieu, 1990).

Final analysis

The inequalities that arise from different social divisions such as race, social class, gender, occupation, education, and geographical distribution among others continue to affect the social inequality. The systems are reemerging in the society in different prospects. Issues such as access to education appear to be highly stratified in the society hence affecting different experiences in the social inequalities. However, there might be a different twist to the way in which individuals experience such inequalities which might simply lead to individualization rather than corporate responsibility

(Graham, 1998). Social inequalities will basically rely on how individual citizens understand and able to contain them. Given the different faces of the problem, even the mainstream theorists such Marx Weber, Karl Marx, Davis-Moore, and Bourdieu are still characterized by inconsistencies/weaknesses on their explanations of social inequalities. Marxist idea of capitalist class presents different fragmentations in their explanations. Looking at current operations in large business institutions lies in the hands of the managerial class. These managers may not necessarily be one of the stock owners within the institution. The revolution of Marx in the employment sector do not hold since most people who held low skilled job today proves to be competent in prestigious jobs that require mental engagement. Most of the workplaces have developed programs that cater for unemployment issues, legal representation, as well as protection of disabled individuals (Wallerstein, 1994).

Neoclassical theories that involve labor market are unable to account for racial, social, sex, ethnic, education, and religious discrimination. Marx idea of relationship in production did not work since it does not draw clear difference and circumstances surrounding the existence of middle class. My view is that the middle class should have a clear distinction between the upper class and the lower class in terms of basic control of ownership in society as well as business institution. Marxist perspective on the middle class is also wide bringing together people who have less social inequalities (Wallerstein, 1994. This indicates the possibility of existence of various classes within the middle class. Middle class in this analysis, therefore, provides a contradictory aspect on the nature as well as members of the

class. The overall aspects, therefore, cloud the debate of social inequalities in terms of explaining age, gender, and ethnic classification. However, Marx Weber aspects of status, power and social class works well to explain the variation in social inequalities.

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