

Essay on power, wealth and inequality

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



In the modern world, social stratification is based on class, race and gender which also determine the wealth, power, and privileges that an individual yields. Social stratification refers to a societal system in which people are ranked in a hierarchical manner (Wright & Gerth, 1964). It is a characteristic that exists in a society that can persist over several generations. Social stratification brings about inequality in the distribution of resources whereby some individuals face systematic advantages in the society while others are disadvantaged.

Social structures refer to the arrangement how people relate with each other and their placement in the society based on their function or roles. According to Karl Marx, an individual's social class depends on how he is related to his means of production. Marx argues that a person who owns businesses, say factories, can be considered a capitalist while a worker in the factory falls under the working class category. Marxists argue that the system inculcates a sense of false self consciousness in workers (Wright & Gerth, 1964). This ideology works as a justification to inequality among social classes.

This false self consciousness is highly disadvantageous. Individuals in the working class group, for instance, hold the belief that the society provides equal opportunities for success to all persons. Such individuals believe that a person's poverty is as a result of laziness, lack of motivation or unwise expenditure of resources. The exhibition of false consciousness is further amplified by the fact that workers identify more individuals in the upper classes than with those in their own class. Marx states that workers should unite to form class consciousness that brings about a feeling of unity within an individual's class. He further argues that these persons ought to believe

that inequality is not just.

The wealth topic is often taboo among the wealthy because the society believes in meritocracy. The individual effort is not the only factor that determines wealth, power or privileges that a person possesses. It is often assumed that those who work hard are the ones who gain wealth. This argument is far from the truth. Statistically, records show that a large proportion of wealth is inherited. The annual listing by Forbes magazine of the top wealthy persons in the world comprise of both those who inherited their wealth and those who worked for it. In the United States for example, of the top 25, 14 inherited their wealth while only 11 worked for it.

Although there is a flexible and open class system in the United States, there are obstacles which hinder persons from rising through ranks and moving from a lower rank to an upper one. In addition to this, the upper class in the society constantly finds ways of excluding those in lower classes from their class. Their lifestyle is often different from the rest of society right from birth. The hospitals where they are catered for, schools and clubs they attend are usually private and exclusive (Johnson, 2003).

The debutante balls which the upper class attend does not incorporate persons from other social classes effectively meaning that they only get to interact with those people that fall within their strata. Due to such structures, other interactions such as dating and marriage to persons from other social classes rarely occur. In his documentary, Johnson's friends point out that friends and family often disapprove when one brings home a person who does not come from a well known family (Johnson, 2003).

Society tends to shape itself along race, class and gender. Irrespective of

choices or efforts made by individuals to improve their social status, it is often up to large institutions to determine wealth, power and privileges yielded by individuals. These factors add a cultural aspect to social class. In the society, factors such as dress, speech, taste and etiquette portray the position held by a person in the society. According to Max Weber, economic factors are not the only indicators of the social class that an individual belongs to. Weber conducts a multidimensional analysis on prestige, power and income. He points out that there are different types of prestige, and it is these types and their association with the occupation of a person that influence hierarchical position (Sills, 2010).

The value placed on prestige is by individuals quite high and it is even possible for an individual to work at a job with low wages as long as it is associated with a high prestige level. This clearly shows how much society values social status. Sociologists today consider the socio-economic status of a person as an important factor in determining social strata. Some of the factors that are considered include income, occupation and education levels (Sills, 2010). Gender also plays an important role in the social strata due to the patriarchal nature of the society. In most cases, men are given preference over women when it comes to matters of wealth and power; a clear demonstration of the inequality that persists in the society. Generally, social stratification continues to be based on class, race and gender and is a great determinant of the wealth, power, and privileges that an individual yields.

References

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