

# True in todays society sociology essay

[Sociology](#)



A life chance is a theory where everyone has the opportunity to improve his or her quality of life, Max Weber a German sociologist introduced the concept in 1947. Weber was trying to describe how likely it is, and given certain factors in an individual's life, how it will turn out in a certain way. Weber's theory explained that an individual's life chance is connected to their socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status takes into consideration the work experience of the individual, or their family's economic and social position based on income, education, and occupation. Marx saw class divisions as the most important source of social conflict. C Wright Mills (1959) unlike Weber, thought that an individual's life chances were a direct result of their position in the social class structure, his theory also stated an individual's life chances were to do with their health, completing education and not being labelled as a criminal. Dahrendorf (1979) introduced the concept of relative chances. Dahrendorf said, "That they were a person's relative chances of obtaining those things desired within society such as financial security and avoiding those considered undesirable like dying young". (Curriculum Press, 2013) New Right sociologists like Saunders, and Postmodernists like Pakulski & Walters have argued that Britain in the 21st century is a classless society, however if social class is to be recognised then Britain is a society where the majority of the population share in middle-class life styles and aspirations. (Moore, Aiken & Chapman, 2006) Social class does have an important influence on people's lives and thinking that this is not significant will not make it disappear. Social class has a major influence on an individual's life chances, as higher classes have better housing, job security and income. Five percent of the UK's population own around forty percent of the wealth, where in contrast fifty percent of the poorest own

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seven percent, as a result one fifth of the UK population today live in poverty. In addition, an individual living in the higher class has a longer life expectancy than that of the working class by seven years, and smoking, drug and alcohol abuse and obesity are far more common in the working class. (Browne, 2008) Traditionalists feel that New Labour has abandoned its working class roots; they feel they have done nothing to change the situation by not redistributing the wealth from rich to poor. Traditionalists also feel that New Labour has not addressed the fundamental flaws that are seen in the capitalist system, accusing the government of playing with the guidelines of social exclusion and not tackling what traditionalists would see as the main cause of their inequality. However, Giddens and Diamond (2005) New Egalitarians said, "The promotion of equal opportunity in fact requires greater material equality: it is impossible for individuals to achieve their full potential if social and economic starting-points are grossly unequal". They felt New Labour and their policies have lowered poverty, especially within the young and elderly. However, New Egalitarians accept there is a long way to go in changing inequalities in opportunity, especially as the economic and social position of an individual's parents still influences their life chances. Giddens and Diamond did not accept that the economic and social position of an individual has anything to do with class. (Moore, Aiken & Chapman, 2006) The upper class is relatively a small class and includes three main groups; the traditional upper class is made up from the Royalty and the 'old rich' the traditional landowning aristocracy, this group also includes lords, ladies, etc. The second group are the 'corporate rich' or the bourgeoisies as Marx would describe them, the third group are the stars of entertainment, sport and media the 'nouveau riche'. The upper class traditionally live in

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stately homes, castles and country houses where the employment of domestic servants is not uncommon. An upper class education would be based on private boarding schools such as Eaton, followed by the traditional red brick universities e. g. Oxford or St Andrews. It is at the red brick universities where the appreciation of high culture is developed, and a sense of leadership is formed. This is also where the upper class will establish their contacts which will help them in later life. Traditional upper class culture would also include things such as going to the Henley regatta, ballet, opera and polo matches. They would follow particular codes of etiquette, enjoy leisurely activities such as fox hunting, horse racing and weekends away in country houses. Their education would prepare them for things like the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, and teach them a sense of leadership and confidence ready for employment in politics for example. (Browne, 2008) The 'corporate rich' and 'nouveau riche' make up the other two groups; this is where they have acquired their wealth and not inherited it; these types of people can come from humble beginnings. They tend to copy the lifestyle of the 'old rich' and try to achieve acceptance in this way, but the 'old rich' tend to view them as culturally inferior due to the lack of sophisticated taste and breeding of the traditional upper class. (Browne, 2008) Middle class this is quite a large class, and refers to those who do a non-manual job, middle class people tend to work in offices. This class has grown rapidly in the last few decades, and consists of a wide range of groups, with various occupations and educational qualifications. Savage (1995) said, "It is difficult to generalise with any accuracy about the shared middle class culture and identity". Middle class people generally live in the suburbs, in a detached house with more than one vehicle. They have a commitment to

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private education as they recognise this for its importance for a successful career. They have a concern with future orientation, by putting off today's pleasures for future gains; and having a higher concern with their health and fitness. Middle class people tend to be more professional e. g. lawyers, doctors and government officials, having higher salaries and their identity is likely to be formed on their spending and lifestyle, (Browne, 2008)The traditional working class is the largest social class, people who work in manual jobs, involving physical or working with their hands e. g. factory workers and labourers. They would live in densely populated areas, in council owned property or small terraces like the traditional mining villages. In the last quarter of the 21st Century, the working class group has declined as the industries associated with the class have closed down e. g. mining and the steel works. Working class people tend to be a close knit group, having parents and grandparents living close by. Men tend to be the main breadwinner with their wives staying at home to look after the children. Willis (1977) said, " Hard manual work is central to a man's sense of masculinity, as being real men was their main source of identity". (Browne, 2008)Working class people saw that getting a skill, and earning money was far more important than education and qualifications, they had a strong sense of solidarity and committed to the old labour party. Working class people also identified themselves as ' us' and ' them' for the bosses, again the bourgeoisie exploiting the proletariat from a Marxist perspective. Hoggart (1969) wrote that in the working class there were strong morals, with a clear conception of doing the right thing. Their insecurity in life was with very few life chances the ever-present risk of unemployment, industrial injury, ill health and ' poverty'. (Browne, 2008)Since 1981 the government has

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increased its spending on health and education by thirty percent, housing however is a different story, this is because investment in council housing has been so low very few have been built, what did not help was the 'right to buy' brought in under the conservative government in the 1980's. In 1981 thirty-two percent of the housing stock was council; in 2000 it had dropped by twenty-two percent. This housing shortage has made local authorities allocate their housing to the neediest; this has created new class divisions. (Browne, 2008) Working class children tend to be much worse in education than other groups, and more working class children leave school without any qualifications. Although more working class children are going to university, they are still outweighed by the middle class. Connor and Dewson's (2001) study found that only one in five people from a working class background participated in further education. However, Savage and Egerton's (1997) study found less than half the high achieving boys went to work in the service class, compared to three-quarters of those who had a father working in the service class. Although, sixty-five percent of the low achieving boys avoided working in the manual class. (Browne, 2008) Therefore, I ask the question again 'Is it true that in today's society we all have the same Life Chances?' Some people would say yes, we are all born unique and our life chances are dependant upon our own hard work (meritocracy). We know that a working class person will never become 'old rich' but we do know that if they have a talent or work hard they can become 'nouveau riche'. On the other hand, some people would simply say no, you are born in a certain class and you stay there. In the 1850's that may have been true, but in today's society we have so many more opportunities available to the lower classes, and with the help of discrimination laws, things like your gender or ethnicity

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that did impact on a individuals life chances are a thing of the past.

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