Stratification

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Overview

‘A stratification system is that complex of social institutions that generate inequalities in valued goods, including but not limited to income, wealth and power’. This syllabus takes this definition of Grusky’s (2007) as a starting point. It considers (a) the social processes that define certain types of goods as valuable (b) the logic of allocation that distribute these goods across various social positions; and (c) the mobility mechanisms that link individuals to positions. Throughout, it considers how gender and race/ethnicity intersect with class or socio-economic dimensions of stratification.

The syllabus begins by introducing social theories of stratification, and recent trends in inequality and social mobility. It then takes six major institutions as sites in the production and reproduction of inequality: families, neighborhoods, schools, labor markets, capital/credit markets, and state institutions. This social-institutional analysis of inequality is characteristic of sociology. However, some works from economics are included, aiding an interdisciplinary dialogue on inequality. The course concludes by considering the evidence for the consequences of inequality.

Learning Objectives

The course aims to develop an understanding of how inequality is produced and reproduced. This includes:

- **Fluency** in the major concepts in, and social theories of, stratification and empirical studies that support or contest them;

- **Knowledge** of key methods in the analysis of inequality and mobility, of recent trends in the United States and how they compare to peer, rich countries, and

- **Critical appraisal** of the theories, methodologies, and interpretations of recent research findings. Students will be prepared to contribute to current scholarly and policy debates about inequality.
One textbook contains many of the readings, often helpfully in a reduced, edited form:

**Structure of the Course**

This 12-week course has four parts:

1) Theories of stratification (3 weeks);
2) Trends in stratification (2 weeks);
3) Institutions of stratification (6 weeks); and
4) Consequences of stratification (1 week).
Part 1: Theories of Stratification

Week 1: Major Theories

1.1 Classical theories


1.2 Contemporary theories


Week 2: Human Capital and Social Capital

2.1 Human Capital and Market Failures

Acemoglu, Daron & David Autor. Chapter 1. The Basic Theory of Human Capital in Lectures in Labor Economics, MIT


2.2 Social Capital and Social Closure


Week 3: Theorizing Intersections

3.1 Race/Ethnicity and Nativity


3.2 Gender


Part 2: Trends

Week 4: Trends in Economic Inequality

4.1 Employment and Wages


4.2 Top Incomes and Wealth


Week 5: Fluidity and Difference

5.1 Mobility trends


5.2 Comparative Trends


Part 3: Institutions of Stratification

Week 6: Families

6.1 Family structures and resources


6.2 Family processes


Week 7: Schools

7.1 Education in Inequality


7.2 Inequalities in Education


Week 8: Neighborhoods

8.1 Evidence for neighborhood effects


8.2 Mechanisms of neighborhood effects


Week 9: Labor Markets

9.1 Structural Inequalities in Labor Markets


9.2 Inequalities in the Workplace


Week 10: Capital/Credit Markets

3.6 Wealth


3.6 Credit and Financialization


Fourcade, Marion., & Kieran Healy. 2013. Classification situations: Life-chances in the neoliberal era. *Accounting, Organizations and Society, 38*(8), 559–572.

Week 11: States

11.1 Policing and the Penal System


11.2 Welfare Systems


Week 12: Consequences of Inequality

12.1 Health and Mental Health


12.2 Status and Power
