

## **Sociology 124**

### **Stratification, social structure, and networks.**

Meetings: Wednesday 10-12  
Location: 501 William James Hall  
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Office availability : 1 pm Wednesday or by appointment  
Course website [https:// canvas.harvard.edu/courses/19483](https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/19483)

Course description: This course will survey competing conceptions of stratification and social structure with special attention to social networks. In a minor but telling shift of emphasis, networks are cast as 'sticky': renewal of on-going contacts is strongly favored over starting afresh. The glue of social life is ever-tightening bonds of accumulating co-experience with partners. Everyday lives, including one's own, can provide multiple examples of the force of sticky networks. Stickiness binds persons into unequal circumstances that are hard to escape, that is, binds people into social strata. Overall, an overarching pattern of simple hierarchy can be shown to be inevitable. The concluding sections will present analytic and empirical grounds for an unorthodox conclusion: a unified, one-dimensional pattern governs stratification in the USA and the UK. Books to purchase

Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.  
Kadushin, Charles. 2012. *Understanding Social Networks : Theories, Concepts, and Findings*. New York: Oxford University Press.  
Simmel, Georg. 1964. *Conflict ; The web of group-affiliations*. New York: Free Press.  
Tilly, Charles. (2005). *Trust and Rule*. New York, NY, Cambridge University Press.  
Volkov, Vadim. (2002). *Violent entrepreneurs : the use of force in the making of Russian capitalism*. Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press.  
Wright, E. O. 2005. *Approaches to class analysis*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.

This course might be sub-titled "how to search for social structure and find it ". It takes on two interrelated conundrums. Earlier notions that some kind of objective social structure exists gradually gave way to culturist and constructionist critique. Actors have agency or free will. Humans act on private understandings and can hardly do otherwise. Such assumptions make it hard, even impossible, to imagine how any unitary alternative could be consistent with the idiosyncratic irregularities implicit in myriad individuals choosing freely and independently. In a somewhat parallel fashion, albeit with less self-conscious reflection, students of social stratification came to agree that all possible concepts of large scale social hierarchy had to be imposed, not discovered, and were therefore inevitably somewhat arbitrary. As a corollary, stated somewhat impolitely, neither 'social structure' nor 'social stratification' could be addressed at all except in abstruse terms accessible only to extreme sophisticates.

To foreshadow what is to come, a far simpler picture can be constructed. The key to a new look is the concept of social network but with a twist. In place of points and links, networks can also be regarded as a very strong bias favoring renewal of old ties over initiating new ties. On this view, structure is not (simply or mainly) abstract but is local and concrete. The regularities of social structure are accessible to all of us and largely familiar. The central novelty of taking networks as 'sticky' provides new ways to examine one's own life-course. This can be fun and should be for many. But there is more.

Such local pattern can be shown to entail an inevitable overall pattern: a unified social hierarchy. Notwithstanding near universal claims that plurality of hierarchies is unavoidable, the unitary pattern is strongly evident in data on occupational mobility. The new approach provides means and motivation to re-think essentially all previous attempts to map social hierarchy. Thus we will repeatedly take a critical look into the background assumptions of major research efforts and entertain novel possibilities.

Hence this course will try to summarize some of the most challenging puzzles of recent sociology, how to grapple with inequality and its sometimes awkward counterpart of social mobility. A tentative exploration of network thinking will foreshadow the ultimate answer. The course concludes by displaying novelties that by any standard are novel and unanticipated.

Evaluation will consist of 2 components. 20% is for class participation. Everyone is expected to read everything, show up, and contribute. 80% is for memos. There are 11 meetings after the introduction. Each participant will owe 6 memos. In a telling illustration of voluntarism and constraint, I will organize choice to spread efforts evenly across the agenda, allowing each to opt for favorites but as necessary enforcing attention to less popular works.

Memos should be posted 24 hours before the class meeting in question.

A good memo responds to the readings in question but raises original thoughts and issues. Simply summarizing key points is a poor strategy unlikely to earn a high mark. Comparing across weeks is highly recommended. It is acceptable to raise points of weakness but generally a very good idea to balance these with commensurate praise for something you find worthwhile. You are expected to adopt a scholarly style, to be civil, and to write as if for an audience unfamiliar with the work in question. Humor is welcome but try not to mask it or otherwise risk confusion.

As a novelty (and experiment) up to 2 memo obligations can be satisfied by supplying a video clip that bears on one or more of the week's readings along with some text, circulated by you, that illuminates your claim to relevance and suggests points for discussion. For 'video clip' just about any media item may be submitted but please check in advance for suitability. This path is optional and no one should feel obliged to undertake it.

Meeting September 6. Introduction. No readings.

Meeting of September 13. Seminal reflections on what how social structure(s) are constituted

The web of group affiliations in Simmel, Georg. 1964. *Conflict ; The web of group-affiliations*. New York: Free Press.

Meeting of September 20. Is social structure 'out there' or is it subject to constant renewal and potential novelty?

Blau, Peter M. 1977. "A Macrosociological Theory of Social Structure." *American Journal of Sociology*. 83:25-53.

Collins, Randall. 1981. "On the Microfoundations of Macrosociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 86:984-1014.

Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press. See especially xiii-92, 162-266

Meeting of September 27. Does 'network' point to a viable alternative? But what are solutions to issue of large scale and of penciling something definite into the *tabula rasa*?

Kadushin, Charles. 2012. *Understanding Social Networks : Theories, Concepts, and Findings*. New York: Oxford University Press.

White, Harrison C., Scott A. Boorman, and Ronald L. Breiger. 1976. "Social Structure from Multiple Networks. I. Blockmodels of Roles and Positions." *American Journal of Sociology* 81:730-780.

Meeting of October 4 Or is the payoff from network that some problems are illuminated by posing them in terms of ties and relations?

Tilly, Charles. (2005). *Trust and Rule*. New York, NY, Cambridge University Press. Ch 1-4 (Pp 1-99)

Volkov, Vadim. (2002). *Violent entrepreneurs : the use of force in the making of Russian capitalism*. Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press. Ch 1-4 (Pp 1-125)

Meeting of October 11 As network studies matured, some candidates for larger scale regularities have emerged.

Burris, Val. 2004. "The Academic Caste System: Prestige Hierarchies in PhD Exchange Networks." *American Sociological Review* 69:239-264.

Headworth, Spencer and Jeremy Freese. "Credential Privilege or Cumulative Advantage? Prestige, Productivity, and Placement in the Academic Sociology Job Market." *Social Forces* 94:1257-1282.

Watts, Duncan J. 1999. "Networks, Dynamics, and the Small-World Phenomenon." *American Journal of Sociology* 105:493-527.

Meeting of October 18 The functional theory of stratification provided an account of large-scale regularity in inequality that sparked heated debate. The argument was in 2 distinct domains. Many authors pointed to what they saw as flaws in the logic. In a different vein, some acknowledged, but others disavowed, that the functional theory was the inspiration and rationale for scaling occupations to form a 'ladder of success.' The ladders remained but what they stood on was not always clear.

- Davis, Kingsley and Wilbert Moore. 1945. "Some principles of stratification." *American Sociological Review*. 10:242-9.
- Hauser, Robert M. and John Robert Warren. 1997. "Socioeconomic indexes for Occupations: a Review, Update, and Critique." in *Sociological Methodology 1997.*, edited by Adrian Raftery. See pp177-225.
- Hope, Keith. 1972. *The Analysis of Social Mobility: Methods and Approaches*. New York: Oxford University Press. P23-37
- Goldthorpe, John H. and Keith Hope. 1974. *The social grading of occupations : a new approach and scale*. Oxford Eng.: Clarendon Press. P22-27
- Treiman, Donald J. 1970. "Industrialization and Social Stratification." *Sociological Inquiry* 40:207-234.
- Tumin, Melvin Aug. 1953. "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis." *American Sociological Review* 18:387-394.

Meeting of October 25. Does social class provide the basis for pinning down the structure of inequality? If so, how, in what flavor, and with what if any consequence?

Marx, Karl with Friedrich Engels. The German Ideology  
[http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_The\\_German\\_Ideology.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf) (p1-12)

Weber, Max. Status groups and Classes.1946. P424-9 in The theory of social and economic organization Free Press, Glencoe Illinois. edited by Talcott Parsons.

Weber, Max. 1978 "The Distribution Of Power Within The Political Community: Class, Status And Party." Pp. 926-40 in *Economy and Society*, edited by Roth, Guenther and Claus Wittich. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Wright, E. O. 2005. *Approaches to class analysis*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press. Ch 1,2, 4 , Conclusion.

Meeting of November 1. Bourdieu provided an account of structure that was by any standard theoretically informed. Just what problems are resolved and which not is somewhat harder to agree upon.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. pp 1-32 99-200, 466-84

Meeting of November 8 How is mobility analysis framed? What has mobility analysis revealed?

Blau, Peter M. and Otis Dudley Duncan. 1967. *The American Occupational Structure*. New York: Academic. Ch 5 The Process of Stratification.

Breen, Richard. *Social Mobility in Europe 2004* Oxford University Press. Chapter 2 Statistical Methods of Mobility Research

Erikson, R. and J. H. Goldthorpe. 1987a. "Commonality and Variation in Social Fluidity in Industrial Nations: Part I: A Model for Evaluating the 'FJH Hypothesis'." *European Sociological Review*. 3:54-77.

—. 1987b. "Commonality and Variation in Social Fluidity in Industrial Nations: Part II: The Model of Core Social Fluidity Applied." *European Sociological Review*. 3:145-166.

Erikson, Robert and John H. Goldthorpe. 1992. *The Constant Flux: A Study of Class Mobility in Industrial Societies*. New York: Oxford University Press. P 28-47

Featherman, David and Robert Hauser. 1978. *Opportunity and Change*. New York: Academic Press. Pp 139-141, 166-173, 192-195

Hout, Michael. 1988. "More Universalism, less structural mobility: The American Occupational Structure in the 1980s." *American Journal of Sociology*. 93:1358-1400.

For a far more exhaustive review, see <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0049.xml>

Meeting of November 15. How a modest tweak of the network metaphor (revealing in its own right) implies an inevitable unidimensional hierarchy, i.e. stratification in an unqualified sense. New resolutions to established puzzles about structural regularity and social inequality are surveyed.

Sticky Struggles by Steven Rytina to be provided, Ch 1-5. Appendix on robust attraction.

Ch 1-4 are strictly prose. Ch 5 and the appendix assume some higher level college math. For those not so inclined, Ch 5 can be skimmed for the connections back to concepts of stratification. Not to be overlooked, the tail-end of the appendix reports empirical evidence that any 'higher order dimensions' are basically noise.

Meeting of November 29. How the principal dimension of Sticky Struggles provides empirically superior solutions to competing alternatives, eliminates any separate domain for tables, is implicit and hence applicable to small, local samples and to almost arbitrary choice of criterion, reveals really existing classes not imposed by fiat, and so forth. Chapter 10 returns to prose alone to recap some of the more surprising implications of the overall argument.

Sticky Struggles by Steven Rytina to be provided, Ch 6-10.