

Inequality and Class

Social Class in Canada

- Sociologists acknowledge social inequality but do not agree on how to define this hierarchy.
- Defining classes in Canada is difficult owing to the relatively low level of status consistency.
- Despite category issues, it is useful to think of four levels of class:

The Upper class

1.1 **Upper-uppers:** these families possess enormous wealth, primarily inherited rather than earned.

1.2 High society or “blue blood”, with “old money”

1.3 Less than 1% of the Canadian population (Irving family, Wesson Family, Bronfman's)

2.1 **Lower uppers:** “working rich” (nouveaux riches) but excluded from high society

2.2 2 to 4% of the population, often with high levels of education

2.3 Success stories often fascinate us because it has long stood as an accepted cultural goal of modern society

2.4 A dual-earner family in which both married parties are professionals can make it into this lower-upper stratum of society

The Middle Class

1.1 40-50% of the Canadian population

1.2 Tremendous influence on our culture (TV & media portray mainly middle-class people)

1.3 Most commercial advertising is directed toward the middle-class

1.4 Encompasses far greater ethnic and racial diversity than the upper class.

2.1 **Upper-middle:** Professionals accumulate considerable property and virtually all people in the upper-middle class receive university educations.

3.1 **Average-middles:** managers, tellers, clerks, or highly skilled blue-collar jobs, accumulate some wealth and children go to local universities.

“You Are Richer than you think”

It is much easier to make it onto the “top income tax filer” list in Canada than in the United States. Most established Canadian professionals earn salaries of 95 000\$ or more, as do many unionized blue-collar workers. A family with two top filers might be ranked in the top 2 or 3 percent regarding family income.

The Working Class

- 1.1** about 1/3 of the population, sometimes called lower-middle class.
- 1.2** Blue-collar jobs, sometimes with little opportunity for imagination and often a high level of supervision
- 1.3** Little or no accumulation of wealth, may own their house in low-cost neighborhoods
- 1.4** Their children have little chance of going to university

The Lower Class

- 1.1** 20% of the Canadian population with the lowest family income makes up the lower class
- 1.2** About 15% of the Canadian population is classified as poor
- 1.3** Working poor: those whose incomes from full-time or multiple part-time jobs fall short of what is required to cover the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing.

Social Mobility

Refers to the dynamics of the system of inequality and particularly to movement up and down the stratification system.

If we think about inequality as either a hierarchy of more or less privileged positions or a set of higher and lower social classes, how much opportunity do people have to change positions?

Upward Mobility

Upward Mobility describes the move to a higher position in the stratification hierarchy. Most people in our society strive to improve their lives both economically and socially. From a societal standpoint, the rate of upward (compared to downward) mobility is a key indicator of a society’s “openness” and wellbeing

- **Exchange mobility:** movement within an occupational hierarchy that can only occur when an existing position becomes vacant
- **Structural mobility:** movement within an occupational hierarchy that can occur because of structural growth through the creation of new jobs or positions and is commonly associated with organizational or economic growth.

- **Primary Labour market:** industries that provide jobs with high wages, good opportunities for advancement, and job security
- **Secondary (or marginal) labor market:** sectors in the economy that offer low-paying jobs characterized by fewer opportunities for advancement and insecurity.

Social Mobility

- Occupational or **intragenerational mobility:** Social mobility that occurs within a single generation or a person's lifespan into positions that are higher or lower.
- Inheritance of social position or **intergenerational mobility:** Social mobility that occurs between generations. The movement of people into positions that are higher or lower than the positions held by their parents.
- **Socioeconomic status:** a method of ranking people that combines measures of wealth, authority (or power), and prestige (a reputation that commands honor and respect, often of income authority, or class position)
- **Education is perceived to be an important factor in social mobility.** Education opportunities are now more numerous for everyone, but they are highly stratified, and they therefore perpetuate rather than erase them.
- **Equality of opportunity** focuses on the chances of participation.
- **Equality of condition** focuses on the chances of succeeding. Students from lower economic classes experience restricted access to certain types of schooling, and they have weaker support for taking advantage of available opportunities.

Power & Occupational Prestige

Occupation is a major determinant of income, wealth, and power. Physicians, lawyers, and engineers are ranked near the top on prestige, while cashiers and janitors are ranked near the bottom. White-collar work that involves mental activity often confers greater prestige than blue-collar work.

Income and Wealth

Income is only one component of **wealth:** the total amount of money and other assets, minus outstanding debts. Distributed even less evenly than income. Wealth is also stocks, bonds, real estate, and other privately owned property. In the world, a minority of individuals control over 90% of all wealth

Theories of Satisfaction Conflict Perspectives

Feudalism was a legal arrangement in preindustrial Europe that bound peasants to the land and obliged them to give their landlords a set part of the harvest. In exchange,

landlords were required to protect peasants from marauders and open their storehouses to feed the peasants if crops failed.

According to Marx, by the late fifteenth century, several forces were beginning to undermine feudalism. Most important was the growth of exploration and trade, which led to the demand for many goods and services. Peasants were eventually forced off the land and had no choice but to take jobs as urban workers.

Relationships between workers and industrials first encouraged rapid technological change and economic growth.

Consequences

The drive for profits motivated owners to concentrate workers in larger and larger factories, keep wages as low as possible, and invest as little as possible in improving working conditions. The working class grew larger and more impoverished.

Class Studies

The study of social class began with the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800s

German sociologists **Karl Marx** and **Friedrich Engels** predicted that the new social order created by the Industrial Revolution would generate enormous tensions between social groups.

- **Class:** the division of people into social groups based on the distribution of material resources and power
- **Class consciousness:** a sense of shared identity and common interests that stems from an awareness of similar economic position, particularly relative to the economic position of others.

Class as a Structuring Force

- **Class system:** a hierarchical classification system that places individuals in relation to one another based on differences in their command of the means of production, work situations, and life chances.
- **Proletariat (or working class):** the social group that exchanges their labor for wages. As they do not own the means of production, they are at the mercy of the bourgeoisie (or capitalists) who own the means of production and prescribe work conditions.
- **Bourgeoisie (or capitalists):** the social group possesses capital and thus also owns and commands the means of production.

Petite Bourgeoisie

In Marx's usage, this is the class of small-scale capitalists who own the means of production but employ only a few workers or none, forcing them to do physical work themselves. They are bound to disappear as capitalism develops because they are economically inefficient.

Critique of Marx

It is generally agreed that Marx did not accurately foresee some aspects of capitalist development:

1. Industrial societies did not polarize two opposed classes engaged in bitter conflict.
2. Investment in technology made it possible for workers to earn higher wages and toil fewer hours under less oppressive conditions.
3. Communism took root, not where industry was most highly developed, but in semi-industrialized countries.
4. Businesspeople developed new ways to avert economic crises and prolong the life of capitalism by stimulating demand.

Max Weber theorizes class is a distributional concept; gradations in class are associated with an individual's value in the marketplace. Four classes consisted of large property owners, small property owners, propertyless but relatively highly educated and well-paid employees, and propertyless manual workers.

Status Groups

Differ from one another in terms of the prestige or social honor they enjoy, and also in terms of their style of life.

Parties

In Weber's usage, these are organizations that seek to impose their will on others. Weber emphasized prestige and power as important non-economic sources of equality.

Power

As defined by Max Weber, is the ability to impose one's will on others despite resistance. Power is not an attribute that people either have or do not have. Less powerful groups must organize and resist, and organization and resistance are themselves bases of power.

Feminization of Poverty

Theory that

1. Women are more likely to be low-income earners than men, and
2. The low-income gap between women and men is growing

The female-male poverty gap is largely a function of women's position in the labor market compared to that of men.