middle-class mothers judge the misbehaving child's intention, whereas working-class women are more concerned with the effects of the child's action.

There is a direct relationship between a person's social class and the possibility of his or her arrest, conviction, and sentencing if accused of a crime. For the same criminal behavior, the poor are more likely to be arrested; if arrested, they are more likely to be charged; if charged, they are more likely to be convicted; if convicted, they are more likely to be sentenced to prison; and if sentenced, they are more likely to be given longer prison terms than members of the middle and upper classes (Reiman, 1990).

The poor are singled out for harsher treatment at the very beginning of the criminal justice system. Although many surveys show that almost all people admit to having committed a crime for which they could be imprisoned, the police are prone to arrest a poor person and release, with no formal charges, a higher-class person for the same offense. A well-to-do teenager who has been accused of a criminal offense frequently is just held by the police at the station house until the youngster can be released to the custody of the parents; poorer teenagers who have committed the same kind of crime more often are automatically charged and referred to juvenile court.

The poor tend to commit violent crimes and crimes against property—they have little opportunity to commit such white-collar crimes as embezzlement, fraud, or large-scale tax evasion—and they are much more severely punished for their crimes than upper-class criminals are for theirs. Yet white-collar crimes are far more damaging and costly to the public than are the crimes more often committed by poor people. The government has estimated that white-collar crimes cost more than $40 billion a year—more than 10 times the total amount of all reported thefts and more than 250 times the amount taken in all bank robberies.

Even the language used to describe the same crime committed by an upper-class criminal and a poor one reflects the disparity in the treatment they receive. The poor thief who takes $2,000 is accused of stealing and usually receives a stiff prison sentence. The corporate executive who embezzles $200,000 merely has "misappropriated" the funds and is given a lighter sentence or none at all, on the promise to make restitution. A corporation often can avoid criminal prosecution by signing a consent decree, which is in essence a statement that it has done nothing wrong and promises never to do it again. Were this ploy available to ordinary burglars, the police would have no need to arrest them; a burglar would merely need to sign a statement promising never to burgle again and file it with the court.

Once charged, the poor are usually dependent on court-appointed lawyers or public defenders to handle their cases. The better-off rely on private lawyers who have more time, resources, and personal interest in defending their cases.

If convicted of the same kind of crime as a well-to-do offender, the poor criminal is more likely to be sentenced and will generally receive a longer prison term. As for prison terms, the sentence for burglary, a crime of the poor, is generally more than twice as long as that for fraud, whereas a robber will draw an average sentence more than six times longer than that of an embezzler. The result is a prison system heavily populated by the poor.

Another serious consequence of social stratification is mental illness. Studies have shown that at least one-third of all homeless people suffer from schizophrenia, manic-depressive psychosis, or other mental disorders. Such people are the least likely to reach out for help and the most likely to remain on the streets in utter poverty and despair year after year (Torrey, 1988; Jencks, 1994).

Thus, social class has very real and immediate consequences for individuals. In fact, class membership affects the quality of people's lives more than any other single variable.

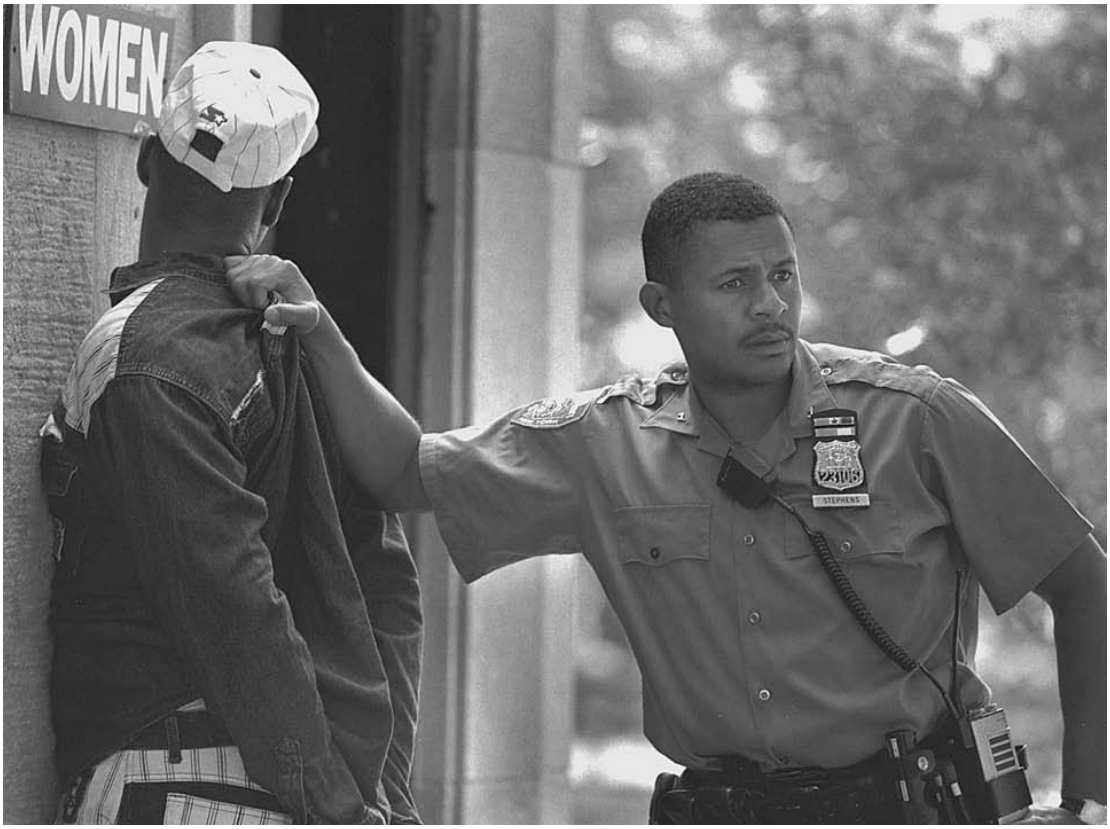
Why Does Social Inequality Exist?

Sociologists and social philosophers before them have long tried to explain the presence of social inequality—that situation in which the very wealthy and powerful coexist with the poverty-stricken and powerless. Several theories have been put forth to explain this phenomenon.

The Functionalist Theory

Functionalism is based on the assumption that the major social structures contribute to the maintenance of the social system (see Chapter 1). The existence of a specific pattern in society is explained in terms of the benefits that society receives because of that situation. In this sense the function of the family is the socialization of the young, and the function of marriage is to provide a stable family structure.

The functionalist theory of stratification as presented by Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945) holds that social stratification is a social necessity. Every society must select individual members to fill a wide variety of social positions (or statuses) and then motivate those people to do what is expected of them in these positions—that is, fulfill their role expectations. For example, our society needs teachers, engineers, janitors, police officers, managers, farmers, crop dusters, assembly-line workers, firefighters, textbook writers, construction workers, sanitation workers, chemists, inventors, artists, bank tellers, athletes,



A direct relationship exists between a person's social class and the possibility of his or her arrest, conviction, and sentencing if accused of a crime.

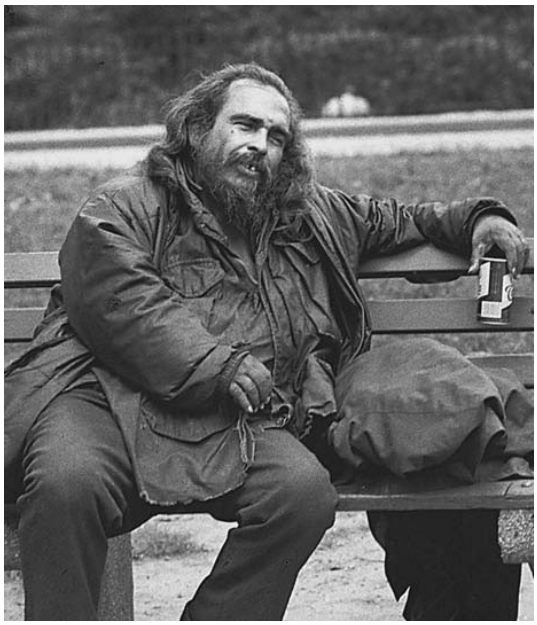
pilots, secretaries, and so on. To attract the most talented individuals to each occupation, society must set up a system of differential rewards based on the skills needed for each position.

> If the duties associated with the various positions were all equally pleasant . . . all equally important to social survival, and all equally in need of the same ability or talent, it would make no difference who got into which positions. . . . But actually it does make a great deal of difference who gets into which positions, not only because [some] positions are inherently more agreeable than others, but also because some require special talents or training and some are functionally more important than others. Also, it is essential that the duties of the positions be performed with the diligence that their importance requires. Inevitably, then, a society must have, first, some kind of rewards that it can use as inducements, and, second, some way of distributing these rewards differentially according to positions. The rewards and their distribution become part of the social order, and thus give rise to stratification. (Davis & Moore, 1945)

According to Davis and Moore, (1) different positions in society make different levels of contributions to the well-being and preservation of society, (2) filling the more complex and important positions in society often requires talent that is scarce and has a long period of training, and (3) providing unequal rewards ensures that the most talented and best trained individuals will fill the roles of greatest importance. In effect, Davis and Moore believe that those people who are rich and powerful are at the top because they are the best qualified and are making the most significant contributions to the preservation of society (Zeitlin, 1981).

Many scholars, however, disagree with Davis and Moore, and their arguments generally take two forms. The first is philosophical and questions the morality of stratification. The second is scientific and questions its functional usefulness. Both criticisms share the belief that social stratification does more harm than good, that it is dysfunctional.

The Immorality of Social Stratification On what grounds, one might ask, is it morally justifiable to give widely different rewards to different occupations,



The mentally ill among the homeless are the least likely to reach out for help and the most likely to remain on the streets.

Neither functionalist theory nor conflict theory can fully explain why media people earn very large sums of money.

when all occupations contribute to society's ongoing functioning? How can we decide which occupations contribute more? After all, without assembly-line workers, mail carriers, janitors, auto mechanics, nurse's aides, construction laborers, truck drivers, secretaries, shelf stockers, sanitation workers, and so on, our society would grind to a halt. How can the multimillion-dollar-a-year incomes of a select few be justified when the earnings of 12.7% of the American population fall below the poverty level, and many others have trouble making ends meet (Bureau of the Census, 2005)? Why are the enormous resources of our society not more evenly distributed?

Many people find the moral arguments against social stratification convincing enough. However, there are other grounds on which stratification has been attacked—namely, that it is destructive for individuals and society as a whole.

The Neglect of Talent and Merit Regardless of whether social stratification is morally right or wrong, many critics contend that it undermines the very functions that its defenders claim it promotes. A society divided into social classes (with limited mobility among them) is deprived of the potential contributions of many talented individuals born into the lower classes. From this point of view, it is not necessary to do away with differences in rewards for different occupations. Rather, it is crucial to put aside all the obstacles to achievement that currently handicap the children of the poor.

Barriers to Free Competition It can also be claimed that access to important positions in society is not really open. That is, those members of society who occupy privileged positions allow only a small number of people to enter their circle. Thereby, shortages are created artificially. This, in turn, increases the perceived worth of those who are in the important positions. For example, the American Medical Association (AMA) is a wealthy and powerful group that exercises great control over the quality and quantity of physicians available to the American public. Historically, the AMA has directly influenced the number of medical schools in the United States and thereby the number of doctors produced each year, effectively creating a scarcity of physicians. A direct result of this influence is that medical care costs and physicians' salaries have increased more rapidly than has the pace of inflation.

This situation is beginning to change, however. The allure of high earnings that attracts many new doctors, along with changing demographic characteristics, could mean a surplus of physicians in the future. In addition, as more and more doctors fight for the same patient dollars, and as health maintenance organizations (HMOs) try to control costs, earnings may begin to suffer. Thus, although barriers to free competition exist in our society, often the marketplace overrules them in the end.

Functionally Important Jobs When we examine the functional importance of various jobs, we become aware that the rewards attached to jobs do not necessarily reflect the essential nature of the functions. Why should a Hollywood movie star receive an enormous salary for starring in a film and a child-protection worker receive barely a living wage? It is difficult to prove empirically which positions are most important to society or what rewards are necessary to persuade people to want to fill certain positions.

Conflict Theory

As we saw, the functionalist theory of stratification assumes society is a relatively stable system of interdependent parts in which conflict and change are abnormal. Functionalists maintain that stratification is necessary for the smooth functioning of society. Conflict theorists, in contrast, see stratification as the outcome of a struggle for dominance.

Current views of the conflict theory of stratification are based on the writings of Karl Marx. Later, Max Weber developed many of his ideas in response to Marx's writings.

Karl Marx To understand human societies, Karl Marx believed one must look at the economic conditions centering around producing the necessities of life. Stratification emerged from the power struggles for scarce resources.

> The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. [There always has been conflict between] freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed. (Marx & Engels, 1961)

Those groups who own or control the means of production within a society obtain the power to shape or maintain aspects of society that favor their interests. They are determined to maintain their advantage. They do this by setting up political structures and value systems that support their position. In this way the legal system, the schools, and the churches are shaped in ways that benefit the ruling class. As Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels put it, "The ruling ideas of each age have always been the ideas of its ruling class" (1961). Thus, the pharaohs of ancient Egypt ruled because they claimed to be gods. In the first third of the twentieth century, America's capitalist class justified its position by misusing Charles Darwin's theory of evolution: The capitalists adhered to the view—called social Darwinism (see Chapter 1)—that those who rule do so because they are the most "fit" to rule, having won the evolutionary struggles that promote the "survival of the fittest."

Marx was most interested in the social impact of the capitalist society that was based on industrial production. In a capitalist society, there are two great classes: the bourgeoisie, or the owners of the means of production or capital, and the proletariat, or the working class. Those in the working class have no resources other than their labor, which they sell to the capitalists. In all class societies, one class exploits another.

Marx believed that the moving force of history was class struggle, or class conflict. This conflict grows out of differing class interests. As capitalism develops, two conflicting trends emerge. On one hand, the capitalists try to maintain and strengthen their position. The exploitative nature of capitalism is seen when the capitalists pay the workers a bare minimum wage, below the value of what the workers actually produce. The remainder is taken by the capitalists as profit and adds to their capital. This capital, which Marx said rightfully belongs to the workers, is then used to build more factories, machines, or anything else to produce more goods. As Marx saw it, "Capital is dead labor, that vampirelike, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks" (Marx, 1906).

Eventually, in the face of continuing exploitation, the working classes find it in their interest to overthrow the dominant class and establish a social order more favorable to their interests. Marx believed that with the proletariat in power, class conflict would finally end. The proletariat would have no class below it to exploit. The final stage of advanced communism would include an industrial society of plenty, where all could live in comfort.

Marx was basically a materialist. He believed that people's lives are centered on how they deal with the material world. The key issue is how wealth is distributed among the people. Wealth can be distributed in at least four ways:

1. *To each according to need.* In this kind of system, the basic economic needs of all the people are satisfied. These needs include food, housing, medical care, and education. Extravagant material possessions are not basic needs and have no place in this system.
2. *To each according to want.* Here, wealth will be distributed according to what people desire and request. Material possessions beyond the basic needs are included.
3. *To each according to what is earned.* People who live according to this system become the source of their own wealth. If they earn a great deal of money, they can lavish extravagant possessions on themselves. If they earn little, they must do without.
4. *To each according to what can be obtained—by whatever means.* Under this system, everyone ruthlessly attempts to acquire as much wealth as possible without regard for the hardships that might be brought on others because of these actions. Those who are best at exploiting others become wealthy and powerful, and the others become the exploited and poor (Cuzzort & King, 1980).

In Marxist terms, the first of these four possibilities is what would happen in a socialist society. Although many readers will believe that the third

possibility describes U.S. society (according to what is earned), Marxists would say that a capitalist society is characterized by the last choice—the capitalists obtain whatever they can get in any possible way.

Max Weber Weber expanded Marx's ideas about class into a multidimensional view of stratification. Weber agreed with Marx on many issues related to stratification, including the following:

1. Group conflict is a basic ingredient of society.
2. People are motivated by self-interest.
3. Those who do not have property can defend their interests less well than those who have property.
4. Economic institutions are of fundamental importance in shaping the rest of society.
5. Those in power promote ideas and values that help them maintain their dominance.
6. Only when exploitation becomes extremely obvious will the powerless object. (Vanfossen, 1979)

From those areas of agreement, Weber went on to add to and modify many of Marx's basic premises. Weber's view of stratification went beyond the material or economic perspective of Marx. He included status and power as important aspects of stratification as well.

Weber was not interested in society as a whole but in the groups formed by self-interested individuals who compete with one another for power and privilege. He rejected the notion that conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat was the only, or even the most important, conflict relationship in society.

Weber believed that there were three sources of stratification: economic class, social status, and political power. Economic classes arise out of the unequal distribution of economic power, a point on which Marx and Weber agreed. Weber went further, however, maintaining that social status is based on prestige or esteem—that is, status groups are shaped by lifestyle, which is in turn affected by income, value system, and education. People recognize others who share a similar lifestyle and develop social bonds with those who are most like them. From this inclination comes an attitude of exclusivity: Others are defined as being not as good as those who are a part of the status group. Weber recognized that there is a relationship between economic stratification and social-status stratification. Typically, those who have a high social status also have great economic power.

Inequality in political power exists when groups are able to influence events in their favor. For example, representatives of large industries lobby at the state and federal levels of government for legislation favorable to their interests and against laws that are unfavorable. Thus, the petroleum industry pushed for lifting restrictions on gasoline prices and the auto industry lobbied for quotas on imported cars. In exchange for "correct" votes, a politician is often promised substantial campaign contributions from wealthy corporate leaders or endorsement and funding by a large labor union whose members' jobs will be affected by the government's decisions. The individual consumer who will pay the price for such political arrangements is powerless to exert any influence over these decisions.

Class, status, and power, though related, are not the same. One can exist without the others. To Weber, they are not always connected in some predictable fashion, nor are they always tied to the economic mode of production. An "aristocratic" southern family may be in a state that is often labeled genteel poverty, but the family name still elicits respect in the community. This kind of status sometimes is denied to the rich, powerful labor leader whose family connections and school ties are not acceptable to the social elite. In addition, status and power are often accorded to those who have no relationship to the mode of production. For example, Nobel Peace Prize winner Mother Teresa, known for her work with the poor in India, controlled no industry, nor did she have any great personal wealth; yet her influence was felt by heads of state the world over.

Whereas Marx was somewhat of an optimist in that he believed that conflict, inequality, and exploitation eventually could be eliminated in future societies, Weber was much more pessimistic about the potential for a more just and humane society.

Modern Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists assume that people act in their own self-interest in a material world in which exploitation and power struggles are prevalent. Modern conflict theory has five aspects:

1. Social inequality emerges through the domination of one or more groups by other groups. Stratification is the outgrowth of a struggle for dominance in which people compete for scarce goods and services. Those who control these items gain power and prestige. Dominance can also result from the control of property, as others become dependent on the landowners.
2. Those who are dominated have the potential to express resistance and hostility toward those in power. Although the potential for resistance is there, it sometimes lies dormant. Opposition may not be organized, because the subordinated groups may not be aware of their mutual interests. They may also be divided because of racial, religious, or ethnic differences.