

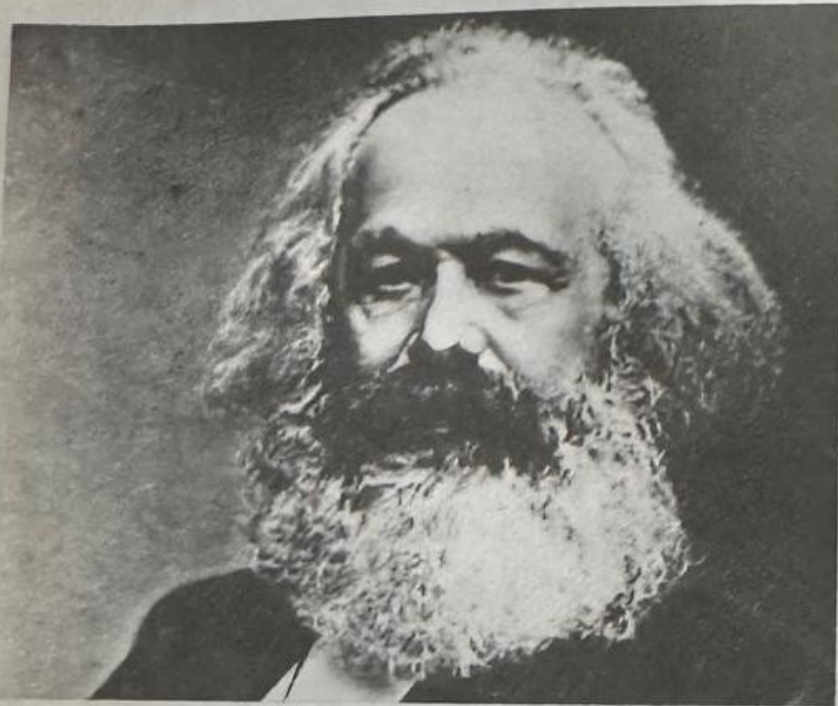
Defining class

In the previous activity, you probably did not fully agree about the exact order in which to rank the factors which decide a person's social class. Neither do sociologists entirely agree on this matter. However, with the important exception of Karl Marx (see p. 144), nearly all sociologists rank a person's class mainly according to occupation. Occupational differentiation is, then, a major basis of class stratification.

The most widely used occupational class scale has been the Registrar General's. However, this has become out of date especially because it does not provide enough occupational categories in which women are concentrated. In the early 1990s, it was replaced by the Standard Occupational Classification which, unlike the Registrar General's scale, is in line with the International Standard Classification of Occupations and better represents occupations in which women are concentrated.

The nine major groups of the SOC are given below. The nine major groups are divided into 76 minor groups which in turn are divided into 364 unit groups.

Two views of class: Marx and Weber



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Marx argued that in capitalist society, class conflict occurs between capitalists and workers. He believed that eventually the working class would win this conflict and that a socialist society would be formed.

Modern Marxists, appreciating that there are now fewer manual workers, often include service sector employees — many of whom are women — in their definition of 'working class'.

Karl Marx (1818–1883)

Ownership of the means of producing goods (or services) or lack of ownership is the basis of class, e.g. capitalist society in which the two main classes are divided into *capitalists* who own machinery and wealth, and *workers* who have to sell their labour for wages.

Weber argued that Marx had exaggerated class conflict and that a new 'white-collar' group was emerging which would act as a 'buffer' between the capitalist and working classes. Weber had far more influence than Marx on official occupational class scales. In any case, Weber did not think that class explained as much about people as did Marx. He argued that people chose their lifestyles (the way they live) in ways that often cut across class lines (e.g. religious groups).

Max Weber (1864–1920)

Qualifications, experience which give people a strong or weak position in the *job market* (i.e. when competing for jobs) is the basis of class. Weber argued that, in general, the better qualifications of non-manual (service sector) employees put them in a better position in the job market than manual employees.

Social mobility and life chances

Social mobility is movement up or down the social class scale. Social mobility may be *individual* or *group*. Individual mobility can be divided into *intra-generational* and *inter-generational*. Intra-generational mobility occurs when a person is socially mobile within his or her own lifetime. Inter-generational mobility occurs when an individual moves out of the occupational class of his or her parents.



Class culture

It is only in a textbook that the economic or material side of social class — income, wealth and occupation — can be separated from the cultural side of class — the way people live. In real life, the money largely buys the way of life. You don't play polo, drive a Porsche or holiday in Monte Carlo unless you have the money, and if you don't do these things, you tend not to know the people who do, i.e. you don't share their culture.

It's true that knowing a person's income and wealth (the basis of the material side of class) does not tell you everything about his or her way of life (culture). But it can tell you a lot. The following activity illustrates the link between money and culture.

✓ Upper-class culture

Who are the upper class? What makes them upper class? Even without the help of sociology, you probably already have a good idea of the answer to these questions. There are two main aspects to class, the economic and the cultural:

Economic — economically, the upper class is mainly made up of wealthy landed and business people. In the economic sense, the 'mega-stars' of showbusiness can be considered upper class.

Cultural — culturally, many of the upper class share a similar *life-style* (way of life), including similar education, leisure and social life. Going to the leading public schools of Eton or Harrow, regularly attending Ascot or Derby days, and belonging to an exclusive London club (mainly for males) might be part of such a pattern. Because members of the upper class share such a strong and exclusive culture, they tend to be very conscious (aware) of themselves as belonging to a particular class — a class of prestige, privilege, power and wealth.

The *nouveaux riches* (newly rich) may not fit easily into this pattern, and some of them, of course, may not want to.

✓ Middle-class culture

✂✱ Many members of the upper class are *born* into great wealth. The middle class has to *work* hard for its more limited wealth and comfort. Children born into the advantages of middle-class life know that they, too, will have to work hard to maintain them. *Achievement* through work is, therefore, an important middle-class cultural value.

Middle-class culture is also very *child centred* (concerned with children). Parents, especially mothers, typically spend a lot of time encouraging their children to develop their abilities and supporting their education. Even when middle-class parents, particularly mothers, 'play' with their children, they often intend to teach them skills or behaviour which will help them in later life. Helping children to learn language skills is most important of all. ✂✱

The following extract gives a good description of the cultural links between educational and family socialisation, typical of the middle class. ✂✱

Working-class culture: 'traditional' and 'new'

The old working-class way of life, based on industrial communities, is now well in decline. This in turn, reflects the decline in the old industries and in the numbers of people working in them. Even so, traditional working-class culture continues to some extent in certain urban industrial areas. Yet this culture was already passing when Richard Hoggart wrote the following description of the working-class neighbourhood well over 30 years ago.