





Ascribed and Achieved Status in Sociology

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Status is a term that is used often in sociology. Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of status, ascribed and achieved status.

Each can refer to one's position, or role, within a social system—child, parent, pupil, playmate, etc.—or to one's economic or social position within that status.

Individuals usually hold multiple statuses at any given time—lawyers, say, who happen to devote most of their time to pro bono work instead of rising through the ranks at a prestigious law firm. Status is important sociologically because we attach to one's position a certain set of presumed rights, as well as presumed



An achieved status is one that is acquired on the basis of merit; it is a position that is earned or chosen and reflects a person's skills, abilities, and efforts. Being a professional athlete, for example, is an achieved status, as is being a lawyer, college professor, or even a criminal.

Ascribed Status

An ascribed status, on the other hand, is beyond an individual's control. It is not earned, but rather is something people are either born with or had no control over. Examples of ascribed status include sex, race, and age. Children usually have more ascribed statuses than adults, since they do not usually have a choice in most matters.

A family's social status or [socioeconomic status](#), for instance, would be an achieved status for adults, but an ascribed status for children. Homelessness might also be another example. For adults, homelessness often comes by way of achieving, or rather not achieving, something. For children, however, homelessness is not something they have any control over. Their economic status, or lack thereof, is entirely dependent on their parents' actions.

Mixed-Status



Guttmacher Institute, about 45% of pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned, which makes parenthood for those people an ascribed status.¹

Then there are people who achieve a certain status *because* of an ascribed status. Take Kim Kardashian, for example, probably the most famous reality television celebrity in the world. Many people might argue that she would never have achieved that status if she had not come from a wealthy family, which is her ascribed status.

Status Obligations

Probably the greatest set of obligations are conferred upon the status of parenthood. First, there are biological obligations: Mothers are expected to care for themselves and their unborn child (or children, in the case of twins, etc.) by abstaining for any activity that could cause either of them harm. Once a child is born, a host of legal, social, and economic obligations kick in, all with the purpose of ensuring that parents act in a responsible manner toward their children.

Then there are professional status obligations, like doctors and lawyers whose vocations bind them to certain oaths governing their client relationships. And socioeconomic status obligates those who have achieved a certain high level of economic status to contribute portions of their wealth to help the less fortunate in society.

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Illustration depicting types of social norms

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Base and superstructure

An illustration of an equal sign made up of a crowd of people. Title: Feminist Theory.

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