

Lecture 1

What is social inequality?



Sociology 102 Social Inequality

Tuesdays 6-8pm, Fall Term

Sept	11 Inequality: A real or imaginary problem?.....	Probs 1
	18 Exploitation: Class inequalities.....	Points 9/RS 7, 10
	25 Domination: Gender inequalities.....	Points 5/ RS 11
Oct	2..... Racialization: Race and ethnic inequalities.....	Points 7/ RS 12
	9Exclusion: Age relations and ageism.....	Points 8/ RS 8
	16 TEST #1 (Based on first four lectures/sets of readings)	
	23.....Victimization: Neighbourhoods and sexualities....	Points 6
	30 Colonization: Regional and national inequalities	Points 10
Nov	6 Stigmatization: Consequences for health.....	Probs 8, 9/ RS 9
	13 ---NO CLASS	
	20 TEST #2 (Based on the second four lectures/sets of readings)	
	27 Punishment: Consequences for crime.....	Probs 7/RS 4
Dec	4 Destruction: Consequences for conflict.....	Probs 10/ RS 13

* Note: The numbers denote chapters in Probs and Points, and denote sections (i.e., multiple chapters) in RS

Assigned readings: Course pack includes

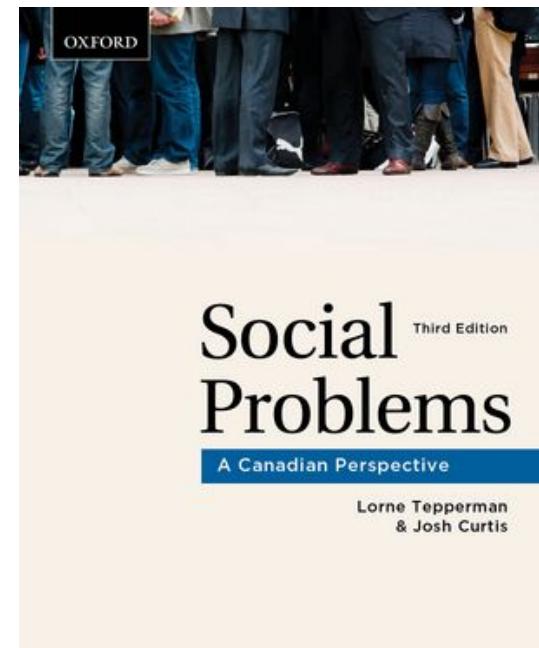
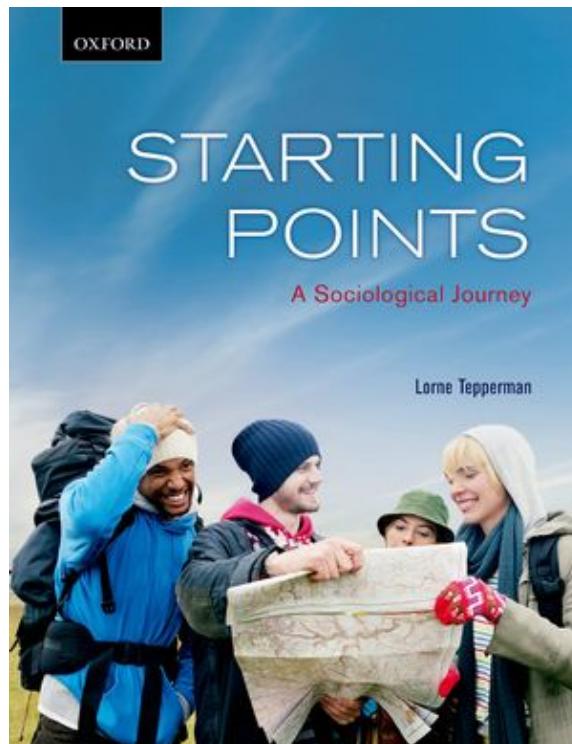
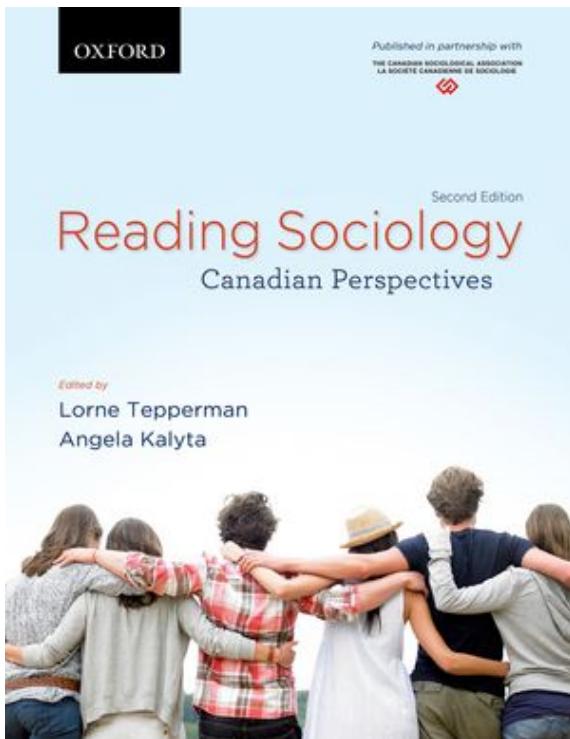
- Tepperman, Lorne (2011), *Starting Points: A Sociological Journey*, Toronto: Oxford University Press (“Points”)
- Tepperman, L. and Curtis, J. (2010) *Social Problems*, 3rd edition, selected chapters (“Probs”)
- Tepperman, L. and Kalyta, A. (eds). (2012) *Reading Sociology: Canadian Perspectives*, 2nd edition (“RS”)

Grading Scheme: 2 term tests (30% each), 1 final exam (40%)

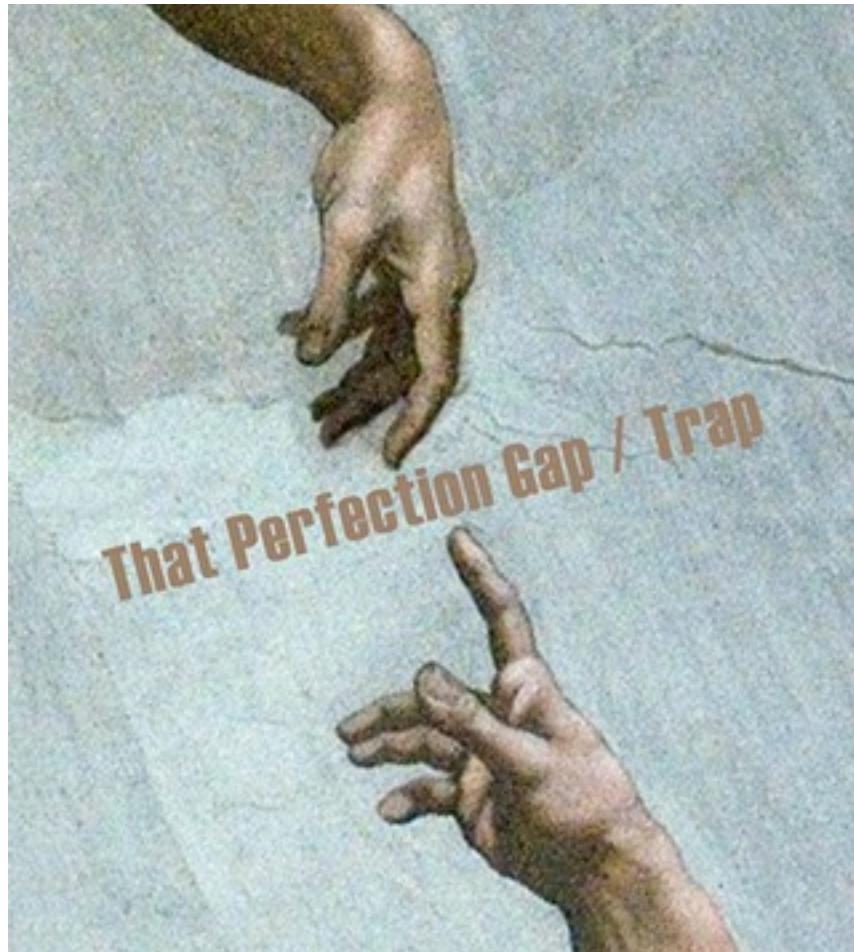
A Closer look...

- Sept 11 Inequality: A real or imaginary problem?.....Probs 1
- 18 Exploitation: Class inequalities..... Points 9/RS 7, 10
- 25 Domination: Gender inequalities.....Points 5/ RS 11
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The assigned readings



The Testing Procedure



- Based on lectures and assigned readings
- No multiple choice test is perfect
- I will make the tests as perfect as possible
- Each test will have a mean of ~70% and an upper limit of ~100%
- So, you do your job and I will do mine

Teaching Assistants in the Course

- Nina Gheihman –
 - course coordinator
- Josh Curtis
- Tara Hahmann
- Teran Giacomini

Available for consultation in person or by e-mail

- Will give review sessions before each test and final exam



What is inequality?



- The dictionary defines *inequality* as the quality of being unequal or uneven
- *Social inequality* is about hierarchical (i.e., better-worse) differences between any two people (or groups)
- Sociology is dedicated to explaining how social inequality works and the reasons most people are at a disadvantage
- It also means showing social inequality leads to crime, sickness, addiction, and violence

Natural inequalities

- Our personal experience tells us there are many *natural* inequalities between people
- We know that simply by looking around us and talking to other people.
- The question for sociologists is, how do these *natural* inequalities become *social* inequalities, and with what results?
- Finally, sociologists are interested in how people invent or *construct* (unnatural) inequalities



The example of beauty



- Consider the *performance* of social inequalities in connection with physical beauty.
- Why do some societies reward beauty – especially in women – more highly than they reward, say, intelligence?
- What are the unwelcome consequences of being plain looking ?
- To explain the creation, performance, and preservation of social inequalities, we need to develop some concepts

Habits of Inequality Theory

- All societies display social inequality of varying kinds – for example, class inequality, gender inequality, age inequality, racial or ethnic inequality.
- These social inequalities are socially constructed: that is, collectively imagined on the basis of a supposedly important natural difference (e.g., sex, skin color)



Inequality Has Harmful Consequences



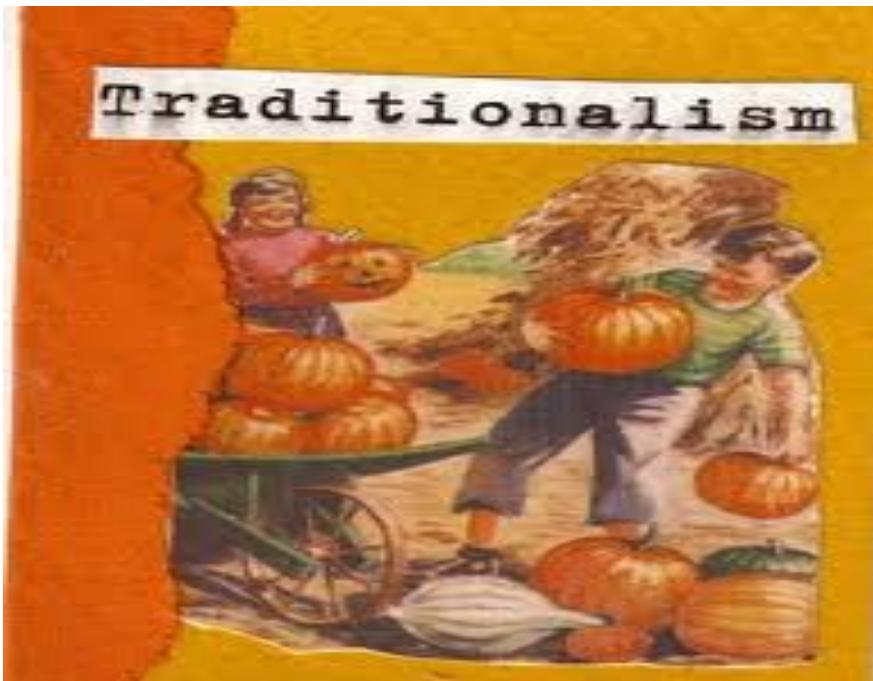
- All types of social inequality have negative consequences for the people they disadvantage, and for society as a whole
- The most extreme forms of inequality produce the most extreme consequences, including poor mental and physical health, crime, and war
- In the last part of this course, we will focus on some of the worst consequences of inequality, for health, crime, and violence

Societies vary in Social Inequality

- Societies vary in the degree and kinds of social inequality they display.
 - The Scandinavian countries show least inequality
 - Less developed societies, and the US, show the most inequality
 - Canada falls somewhere near the middle of the pack
- Societies with the widest variety and intensity of inequality are most likely to display clear and long-lasting patterns we call “habits of inequality”



Correlates of the Inequality Habit



- These habits of inequality are related to other cultural patterns: especially,
 - Traditionalism
 - Religiosity
 - Militarism
 - Parochialism
-

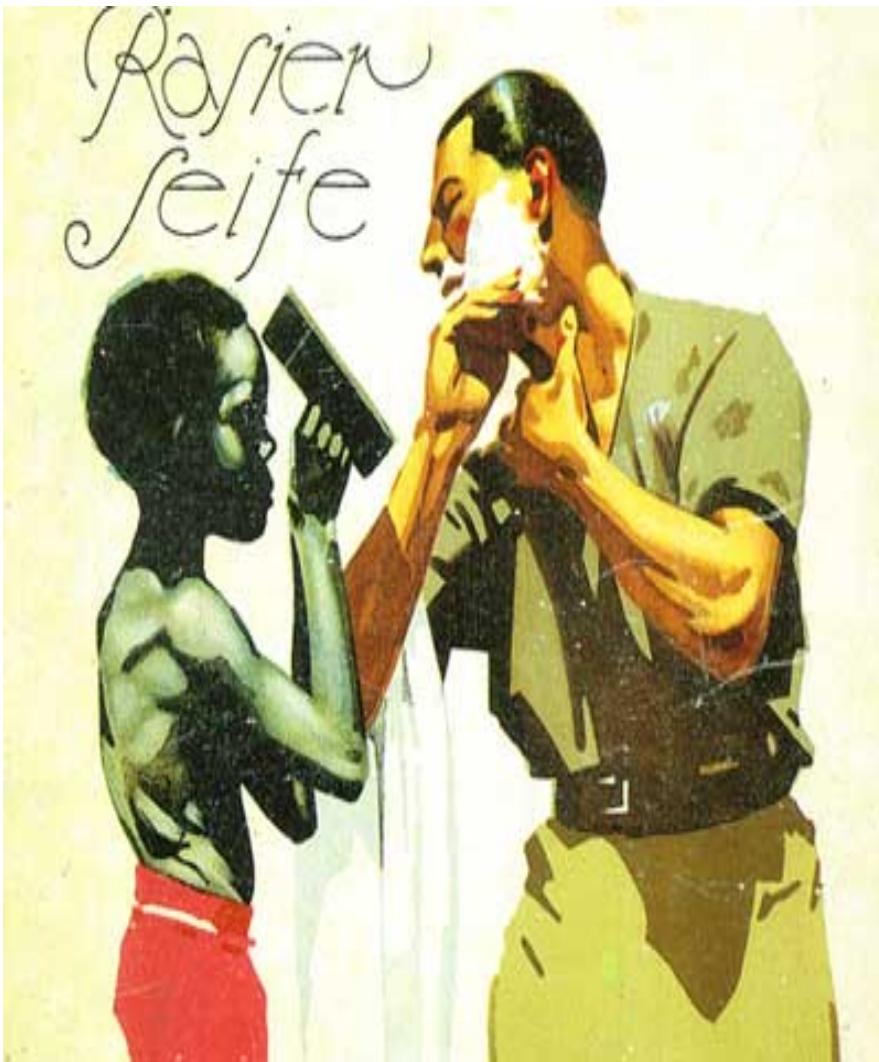
The Cultural Habits:

S-N-P-N-S

- All types of social inequality display similar patterns or cultural “habits” that include the following (S-N-P-N-S):
 1. S= Social differentiation
 2. N = Narratives of blame
 3. P = Practices of oppression
 4. N = Narratives of validation
 5. S = Strategies of resistance



S = Social Differentiation



- *Social differentiation* is the practice of identifying different "kinds" of people who are assumed to be essentially and unchangeably different, and whose difference is consequential for social and economic life
- This process is the transformation of natural differences (for example, in skin colour or sex) into socially important differences and inequalities.

N = Narratives of Blame

- *Narratives of blame* are socially constructed accounts that attach social or moral qualities to different groups to explain why advantaged people are advantaged and disadvantaged people are disadvantaged.
- These narratives derive from a belief that the world is just in its distribution of rewards and punishments (more about this later) – the so-called Just World Theory



P = Practices of Oppression



- *Practices of oppression* comprise a variety of economic and non-economic behaviors including exploitation, domination, exclusion, discrimination, stigmatization
- These practices of oppression may follow the creation of narratives of blame, or may precede them, in which case the narratives serve to justify pre-existing oppression.

N = Narratives of Validation

- *Narratives of validation* are socially constructed accounts that attach different, even opposite, social and moral qualities to groups in society, as a response to narratives of blame.
- They may take various forms:
 - deny the factual accuracy of the blame narratives, denying any fault, deficiency, or misdeed
 - deny any choice, guilt, or control over the actions for which blame narratives hold them responsible.
 - hold advantaged people responsible for creating conditions that are blameworthy



S = Strategies of Resistance



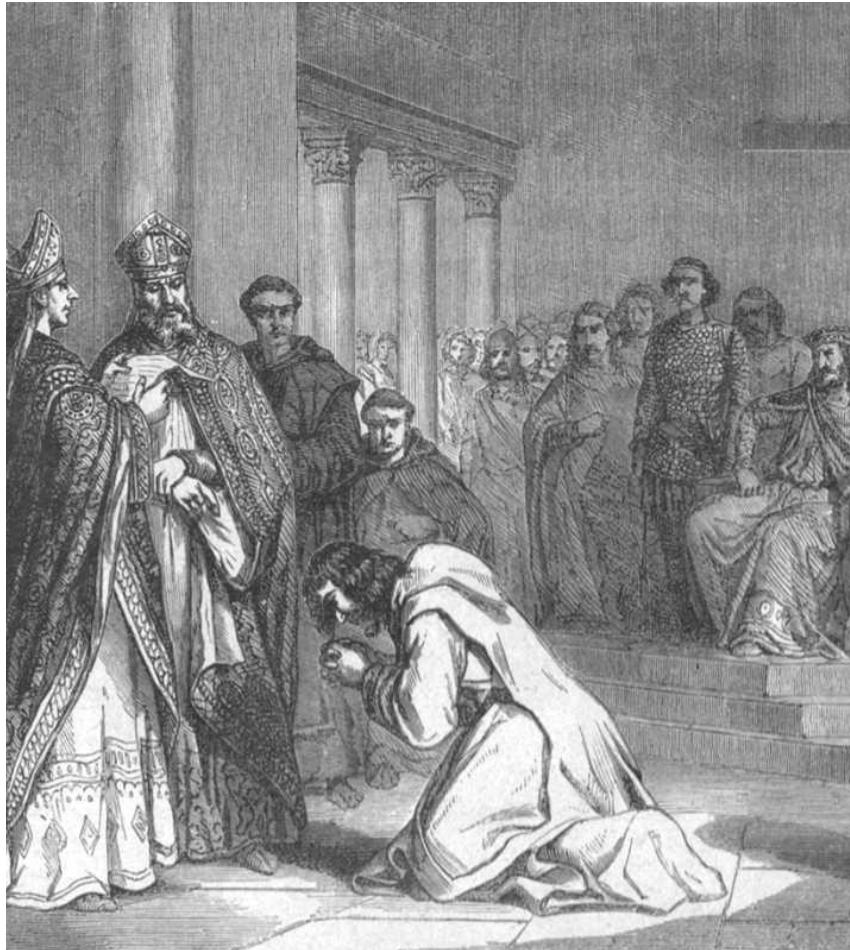
- *Strategies of resistance* include collective (social) actions that combat practices of oppression, reduce inequality, or ameliorate the effects of inequality.
- They may take various forms:
 - consciousness raising activities
 - social movement formation to achieve social and political goals
 - institutional completeness: the formation of self-sufficient communities
 - information dissemination (via media, schools, churches) to change public attitudes
 - legal challenges to oppression, through the courts

Continuing Struggle

- Under continuing conditions of inequality, there will be a continuing struggle between narratives of blame and narratives of validation; and between practices of oppression and strategies of resistance.
- Under certain circumstances, the struggle over one form of inequality (e.g., race) will influence and energize the struggle over another form of inequality (e.g., gender)



Popular images of inequality



- In this course, we will consider many popular views about inequality
- These include views like “everyone is different” and “everyone has a fair (or equal) chance to get ahead”
- Most of these views are untested by evidence
- If they were tested, they would be proven wrong

Is inequality a problem?

- People hold strong, passionate, often angry or bitter views about inequality.
- But is *inequality* a real problem in society or an imaginary one?
- To answer this, we need to recognize that social issues like inequality have at least two aspects
 - Objective and subjective elements, or
 - Scientific and political elements



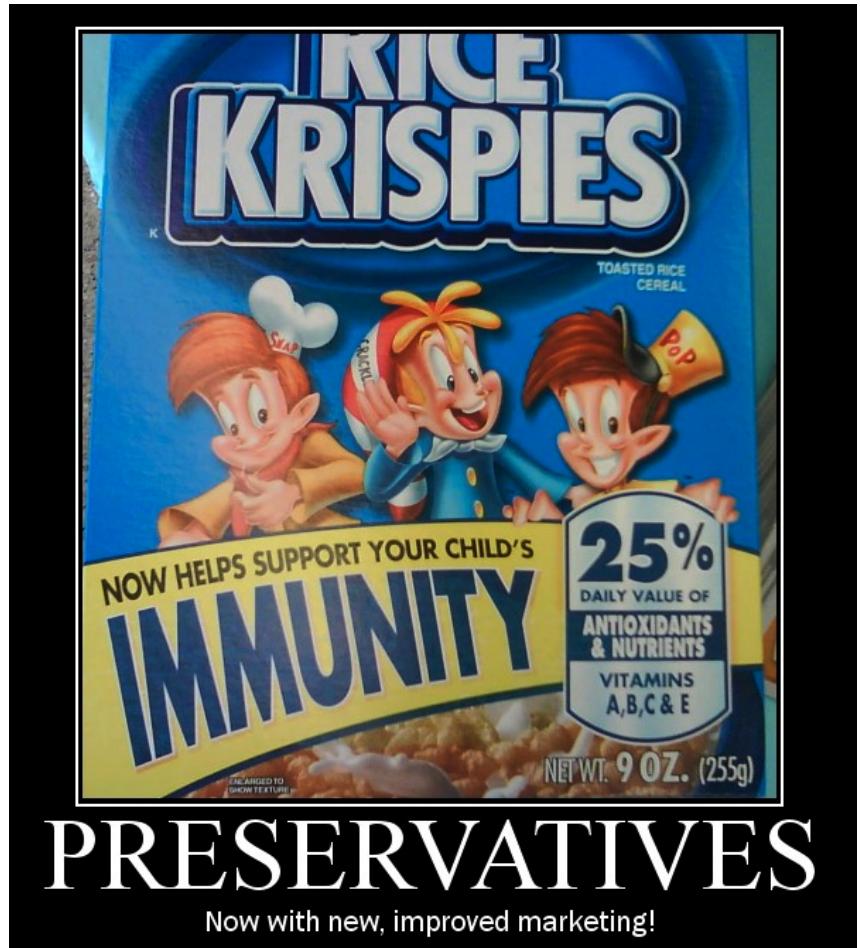
Objective aspects of inequality



- *Objective* elements are measurable signs of disadvantage
- We can measure the existence and prevalence of inequality
- This “objective” kind of research is based on a philosophical premise, called ‘positivism’, that there is a physical reality we can perceive with our senses.

Subjective aspects of inequality

- Equally, we can be interested in the subjective elements of a social issues or problem.
- *Subjective elements* are people's *evaluations* of objective conditions
- These moral or esthetic judgments reflect people's tastes and values; and they are a social reality in their own right.
- So, we can make and test theories about people's subjective beliefs and the social outcomes of these beliefs



Both aspects of inequality matter

- These ‘subjective realities’ are no less important than ‘objective realities.’
- As sociologists, we need to take account of people’s thoughts and beliefs, as well as the objective situations in which they find themselves.
- Both types of reality lead people to take steps that change lives – our own and others’.



The “social construction” of a social problem?

- The “social construction” of social problems means putting a problem on the political agenda.
 - Making people take notice of it
- A central feature in the social construction of social problems is called ‘claims-making’
- That means making (and promoting) particular ways of thinking

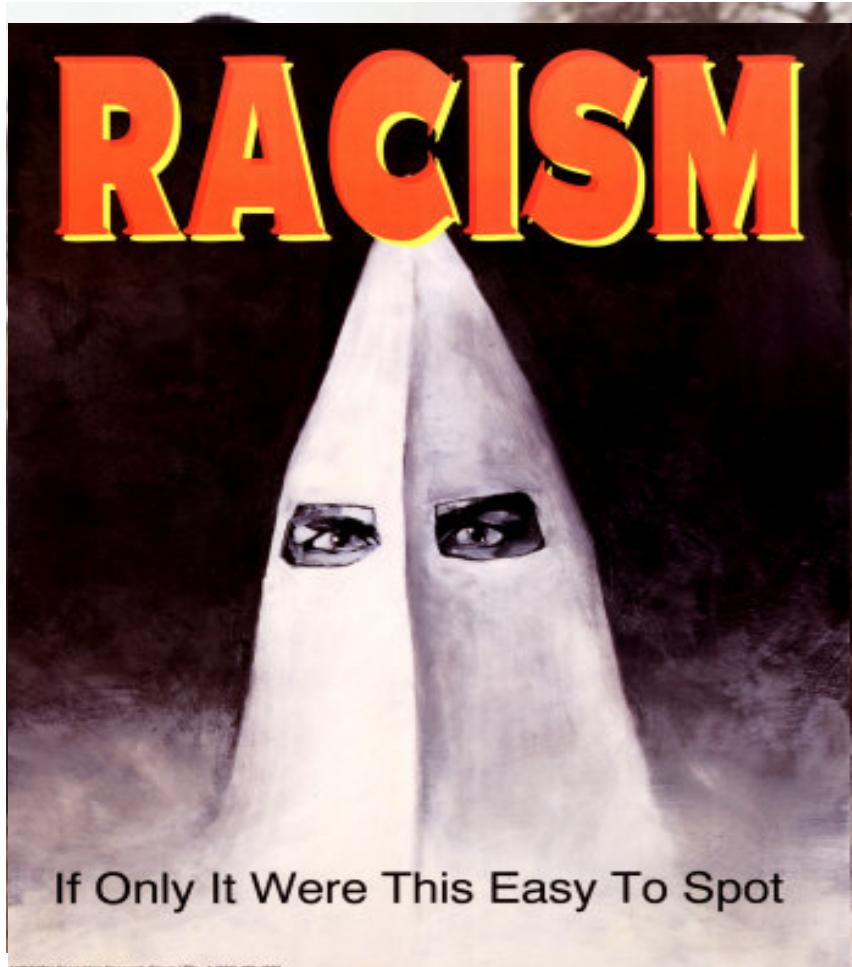


Some problems are more self-evident than others

- Some would say problems *only* become social problems when claims-makers and moral entrepreneurs succeed in drawing public attention to them
- However, some problems **deserve** our attention even if most people are ignoring them, most of the time.
- Consider the example of racism.



Why *might* racism be a problem?

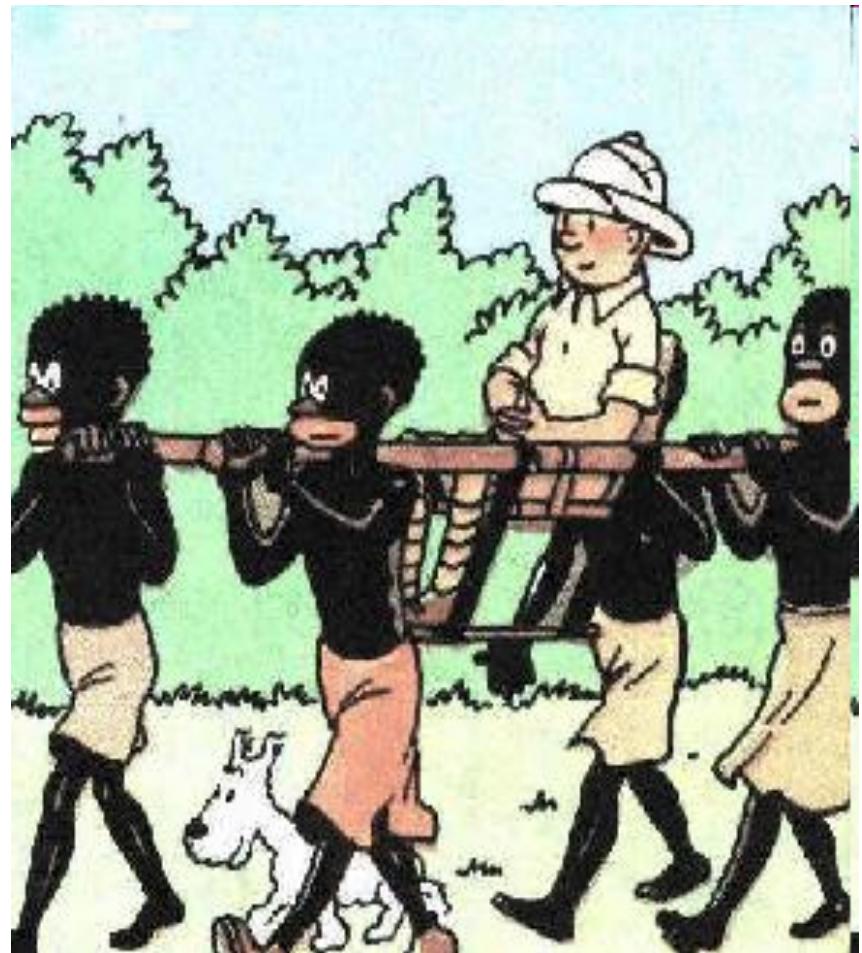


- First, racism may cause ethical problems.
 - We like to think Canadians are not racists
- Second, inequalities based on race might also pose practical problems, such as income inequality, poverty, crime, and demoralization.
- Third, the lack of intergroup contact, due to racism, may isolate non-white people from mainstream Canadian society.

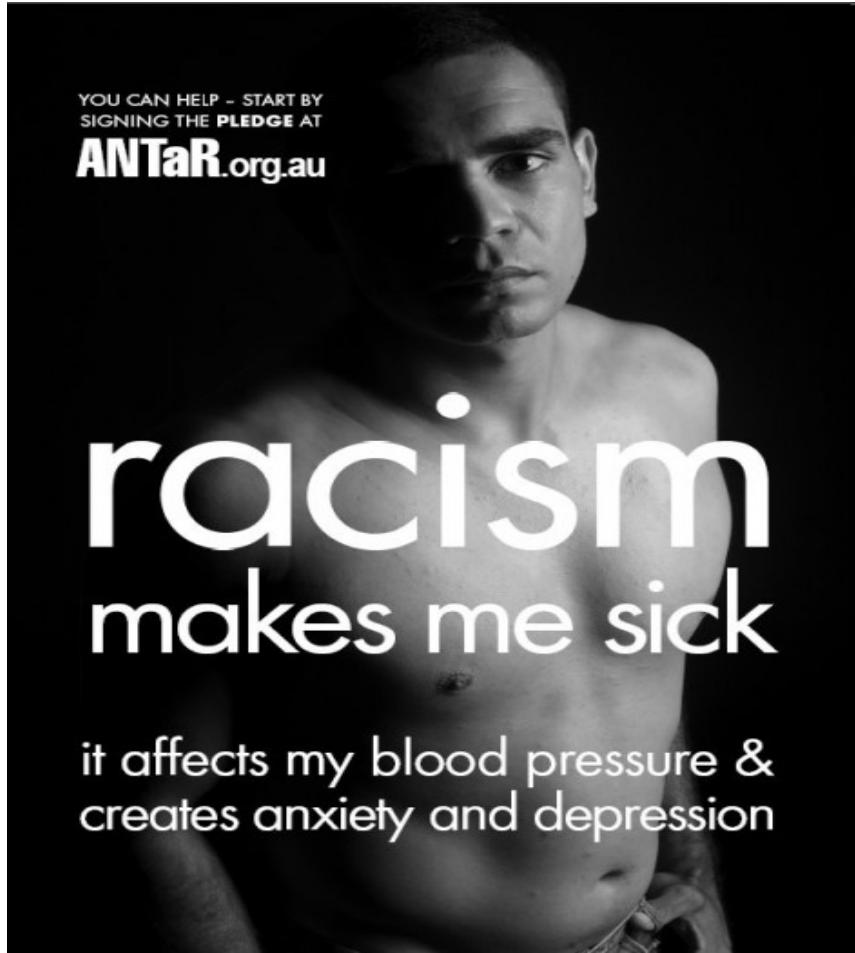
Racism hurts people

Fourth, racism might produce secondary psychological effects like prejudice and even self-hate.

- Racism may even produce bad health conditions.
- Poor health conditions are important indicators of social disadvantage



How is Canada doing, comparatively?



- If people suffer from poverty or ill health because of racism, we can readily see the result, understand it, and worry about it.
- We might also need to ask ourselves whether *Canada's* problems of racism – or inequality more generally -- are worse than those found in other societies, and if so why?
- We need to ask these questions because, as sociologists, we do not compare real societies with ideal societies – that is, with utopias.

Let's not be idealists

Remember philosopher Thomas Malthus' famous quote about ostriches, in his *Essay on Population* (1798):

- He ends, “I put out of the question, at present, all mere conjectures, that is, all suppositions, the probable realization of which cannot be inferred upon any just philosophical grounds.”
- That means, let's worry about human life as it exists, not as we might wish it to exist.



Rousseau's theory of inequality



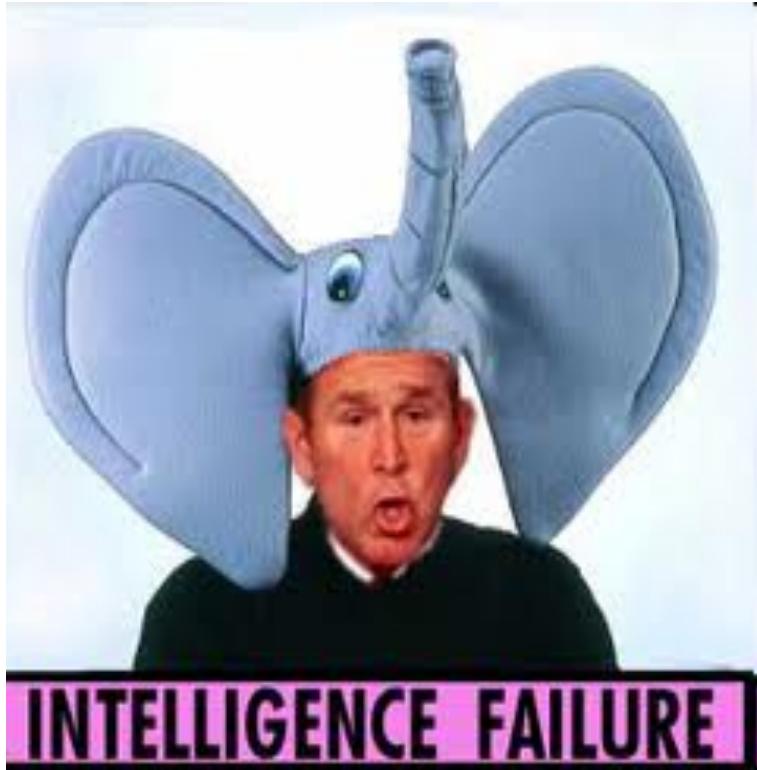
- Why should we care about social inequality?
- Consider the reasoning of French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau
- Rousseau rightly begins by discussing the difference between *natural* versus *social* inequality

When is privilege unjustified?

- The dictionary defines a privilege as “a right, advantage, favor, or immunity specially granted to a certain individual, group, or class, and withheld from certain others or all others.”
- Rousseau argues that social inequality must be proportional to be just.
- “social inequality is contrary to natural right *whenever it is not combined in the same proportion with physical inequality.*”

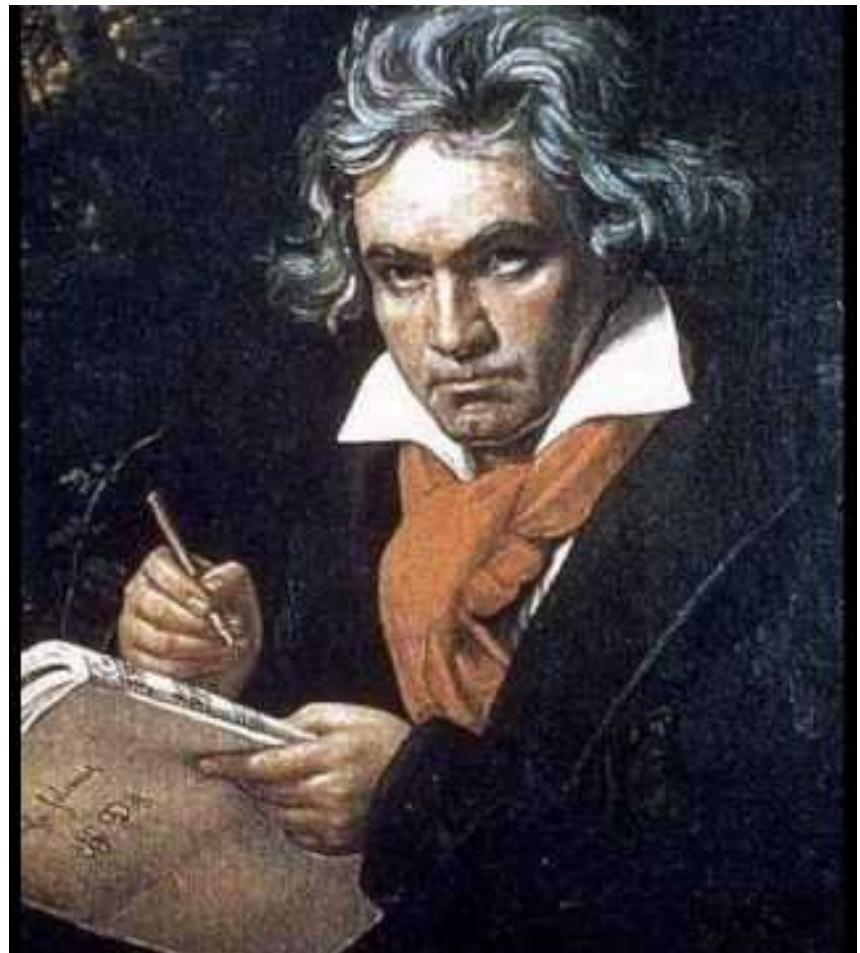


One injustice: when the stupid lead the wise



- any privilege or inequality that is not explained and justified by a natural difference is contrary to natural right and to the laws of nature.
- Rousseau correctly identifies why most people care about social inequality.
- It is because extreme inequality, extreme privilege, and extreme disadvantage, are *unfair*.

What would Rousseau say about...



We know it when we see it

- Rousseau is saying we all know when socially unequal privilege has gone too far, and we reject it.
- By *social inequality*, sociologists mean unequal --- usually, unjustifiable -- privileges, rewards or opportunities for different individuals within a group, or groups within a society.
- So, for example, students all expect to be treated equally in a sociology course.



Is inequality inevitable?



- We also expect society to be fair; or else, we are angry, even outraged.
- But perhaps inequality is inevitable – inescapable..
- According to some thinkers, inequality is the price to be paid for dynamic economic growth under capitalism.

What equalities are attainable?

- We will want to consider what inequalities are justifiable and what equalities are humanly attainable.
- And we will want to consider the human costs of inequality, and factor them into the cost-benefit analysis
- E.g., we will see that social inequality creates and maintains a large underclass in which disadvantage is transferred from one generation to the next



Equality = social justice

- Like Rousseau, I will argue that social inequality is the opposite of *social justice*.
- However, like equality, “justice” is a difficult concept.
- Most people would say that justice consists of **fair exchange** ($\$1 = 100$ cents) and **fair reward** (reward = input)



Christopher Jencks' schoolteacher



- However, judging fairness is difficult
- Consider an example to illustrate this difficulty
- Sociologist Christopher Jencks asks how should an elementary school teacher, Miss Jones, fairly allocate her time to helping readers in her fourth grade classroom?

Which is the fairest way to allocate scarce resources?

What is the fair way to do so?

- *democratic equality*
 - treat everyone the same
- *moralistic justice*
 - reward biggest effort
- *weak humane justice*
 - reward most economically disadvantaged
- *strong humane justice*
 - reward *all* disadvantaged
- *utilitarianism*
 - reward *the fastest learners*
- What principle would you support here?

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What are the pros and cons of each?

- *democratic equality*
 - *treat everyone the same*
 - Equal input by Ms Jones *does not* produce equal outcome
- *moralistic justice*
 - reward the biggest effort
 - Unequal input by Ms Jones produces unequal outcome
- *weak humane justice*
 - reward most economically disadvantaged
 - This is unfair to other disadvantaged students
- *strong humane justice*
 - reward *all* disadvantaged
 - This is unfair to people who are trying hardest
- *utilitarianism*
 - reward the fastest learners
 - Does society benefit from this, or merely the fastest learners?

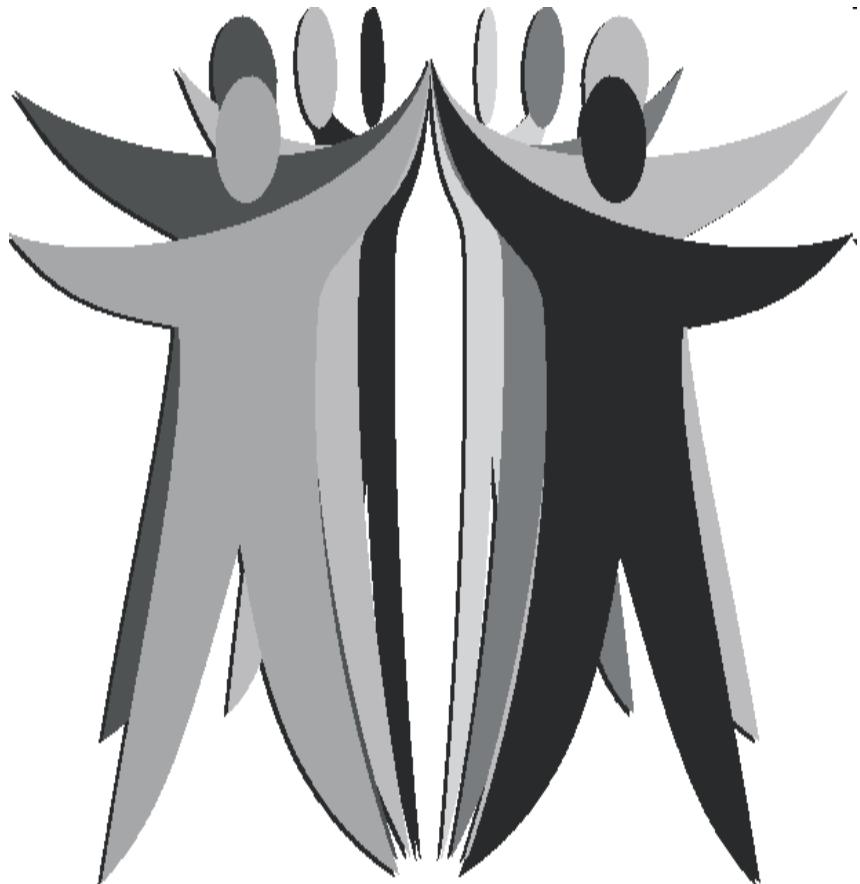
Rawls: Do no (more) harm



- Most academic debate around the concept of “justice” starts with John Rawls's famous ‘difference principle.’
- “equality is the default position, unless inequality will serve to improve the position of the already disadvantaged.”
 - E.g., affirmative action
- social justice will mean making laws as though the law-makers were the most underprivileged

Popular view: reward “merit”

- Far more familiar in our society is the notion that equality means rewarding people according to “merit”.
- However, this “meritocratic” approach forces us to ask what constitutes merit
 - People who try hardest? or
 - People who are most gifted?
- Why should we reward people who are born smart or gifted?



But why reward “merit”?



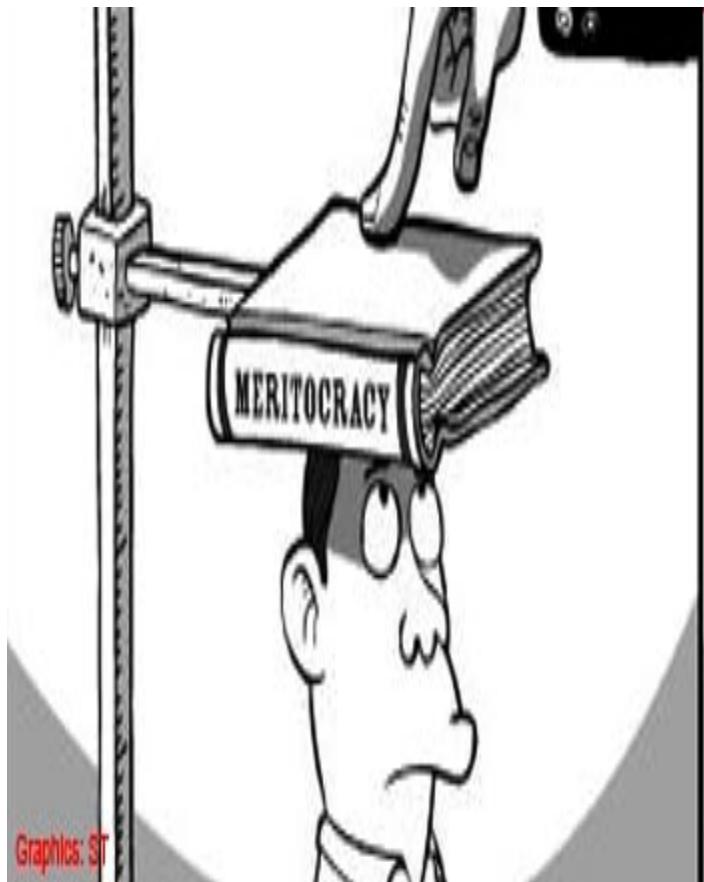
- Moreover, who can rightly claim credit for their own merit?
 - Effects of family life on aspirations, achievements in school
- Rawls says that even a quality like the ability to work hard is a chance attribute.
- Sociologists have grappled with this question in the so-called functional theory of stratification, credited to Davis and Moore (1945).

The functional theory of stratification

- The skills society needs are scarce, because in-born talent is rare and training is costly.
 - E.g., brain surgeons
- This scarcity of skills means society will have to induce or persuade talented people to train.
- In the end, inequality benefits all of society.
- In this sense, inequality leads to the survival of society.



Problems with functional theory

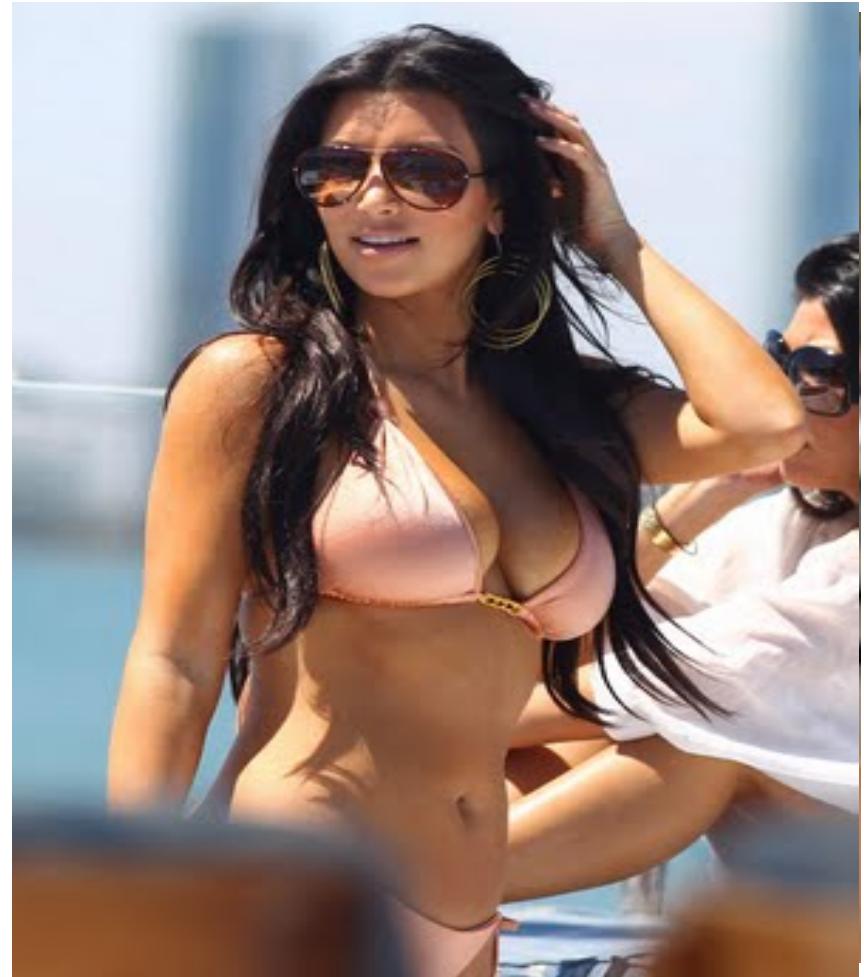


- First, it ignores the *inheritance* of wealth and status.
- Second, it ignores *disagreement* about society's "most important roles."
- Third, it fails to explain why top figures in organized crime, sports, or entertainment receive high wages and great social prominence.

Too many exceptions to the rule

The functional theory does a poor job of accounting for many types of inequalities.

- People like Prince Charles and Kim Kardashian get far more rewards than they deserve
- People like Nelson Mandela get far fewer rewards than they deserve
- The majority of people in society get almost no rewards at all but do most of the work



The supposed ladder of success



- Why do North Americans accept the functional theory of stratification?
- Perhaps, they believe they have good opportunities -- perhaps even equal opportunities -- to move up the social ladder.
- Or perhaps they hold unfounded beliefs about the fairness of their society

Just World Theory



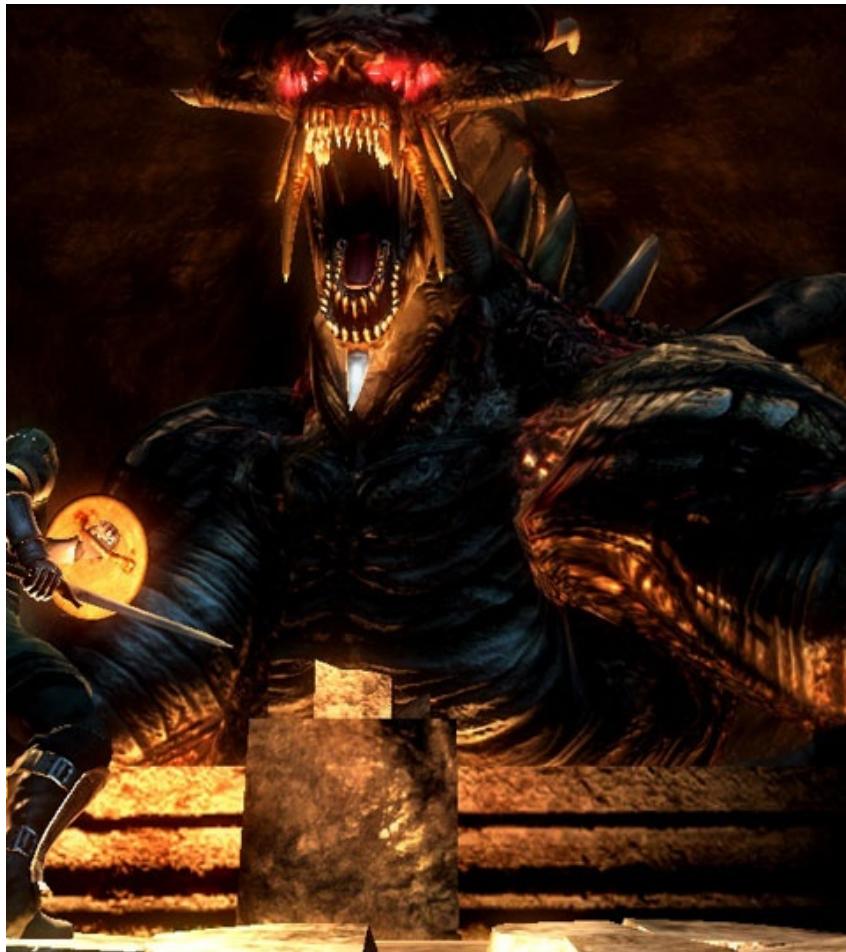
- Lerner and Simmons proposed in 1966 that people use psychological strategies to make the world seem less threatening
- As a child gives up seeking immediate gratification in favour of a longer-term strategy, the child comes to feel entitled to certain rewards by virtue of having made the appropriate sacrifices
- However, this only makes sense if the child lives in **a just world** where each person eventually gets what he or she deserves.

The positive functions of this belief

- People who believe in a just world are found to be more satisfied with life, less anxious, and less depressed
- People who believe in a just world also feel more confident and more secure about their lives
- However, people who believe in a just world tend to discount information about social injustice as it would undermine their commitment to their “personal contract”



Ignore the obvious or make up stories



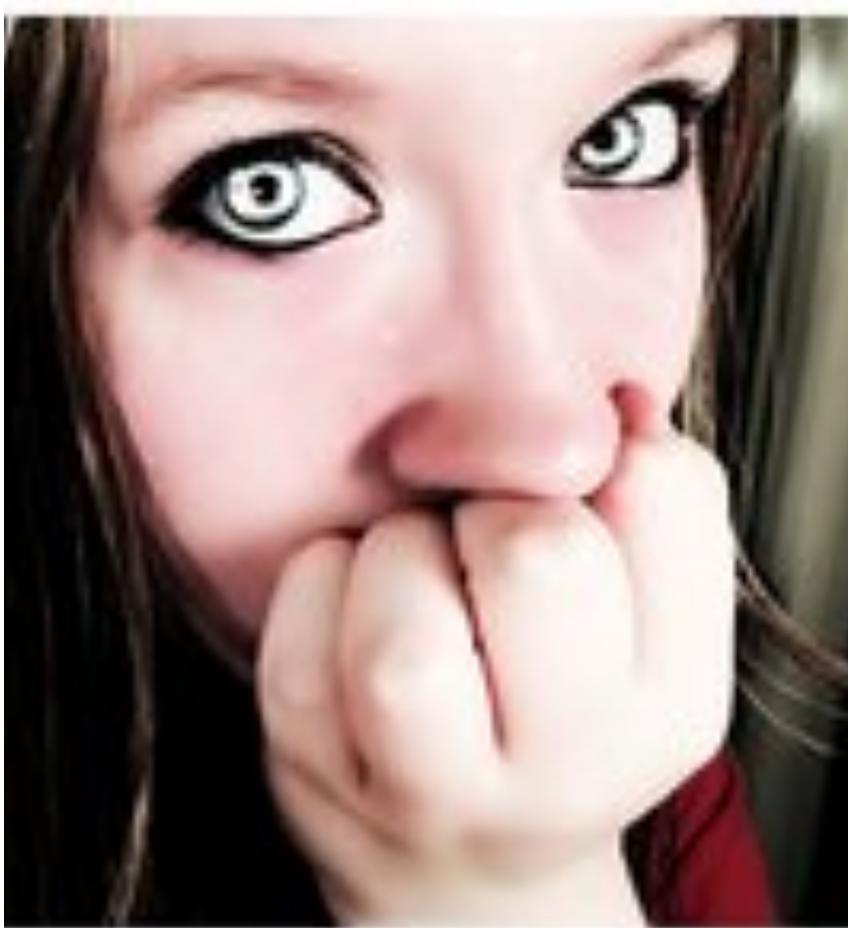
- When they encounter information that cannot be simply ignored or discounted, believers tend to shift the blame or invent fanciful excuses
- For example, Krumie et al found that 48% of their sample endorsed some form of demonization to explain their recent divorce

Blame those who will not or cannot change

- When presented with an “innocent” victim whose suffering seemed unfair, experimental subjects helped the victim *if* they believed that it would end the victim’s suffering.
- However, if they believed that the suffering would continue, subjects tended to attack the victim’s character and describe him/her in negative terms.



Blame the unfamiliar



Believers are less likely to blame victims they can identify with

- E.g., they contribute more resources to save the lives of victims “like themselves” than victims who are anonymous or very different
- E.g., middle-class Canadian homeowners versus people with AIDS in African villages
- Identification appears to also influence their perceptions of both victims and villains

All victims are blamed similarly

- Virtually all kinds of disadvantaged people are treated the same way by believers in the “just world”, regardless of how they came to be disadvantaged, e.g.
 - victims of sex crimes (primarily rape and sexual assaults)
 - people with chronic illnesses or disabilities
 - People who are unemployed or on welfare



'Blame the Victim' Cries Emerge After Girl's Rape

Mar 11, 2011 12:37 PM CST

Blaming – even self-blaming -- increases with inequality



Ironically, belief in a just world increases as hardship (e.g., inequality) increases

- i.e., inequality has frightening consequences, and frightened people tend to embrace just world beliefs more firmly

Victims may even apply just world beliefs to their own situation.

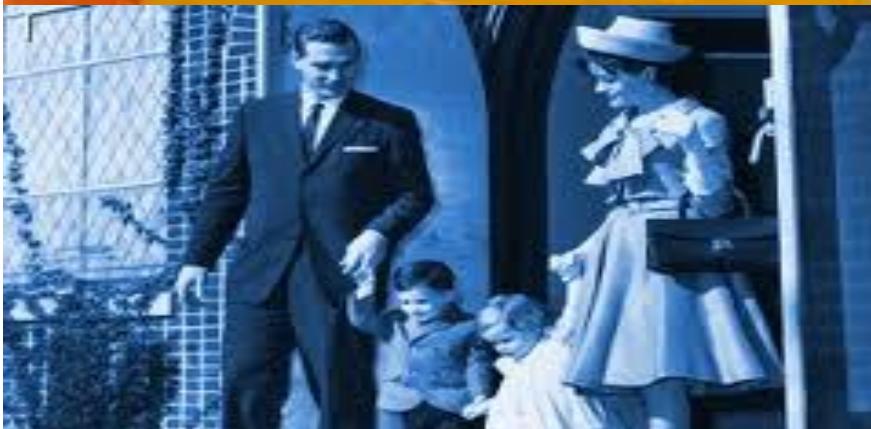
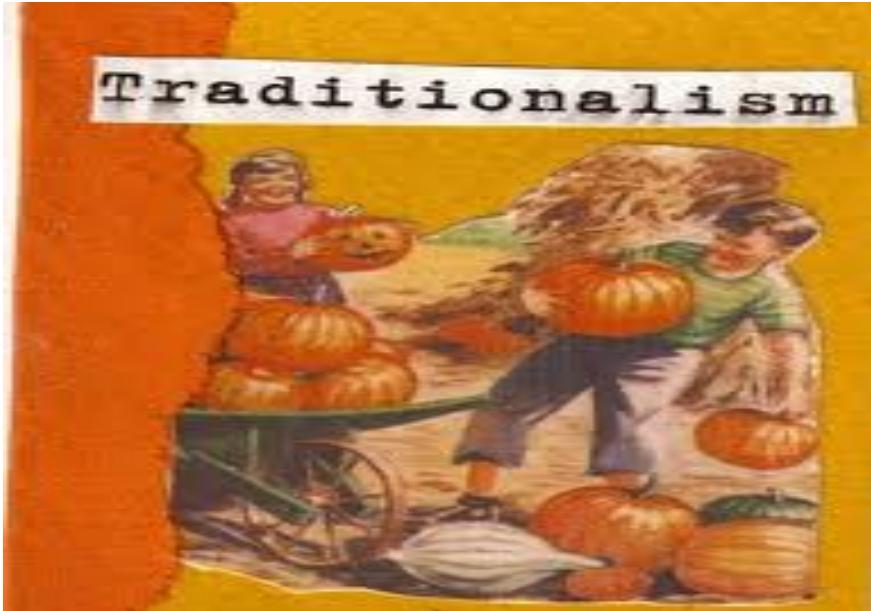
- E.g., victims of chronic pain who were diagnosed with arthritis applied just world beliefs to themselves – i.e., blamed themselves –even more often than they endorsed general beliefs in a just world

There are cultural differences

- Beliefs in the just world vary from one society to another and one group to another
- For example, a study of Californians found Latinos showed the strongest belief in a just world, whereas blacks showed the weakest
 - Effect of Catholic vs Protestant worldview?
- The same study found that religious affiliation influences the belief in a just world, but church attendance does not.



Remember these correlates of the Inequality Habit



- These habits of inequality are related to other cultural patterns: especially,
 - Traditionalism
 - Religiosity
 - Militarism
 - Parochialism
- They likely relate to just-world thinking too

Key “habits of inequality”

In this course we will discuss some of the harmful processes resulting from (or increased by) inequality

They include:

- Exploitation
 - Domination
 - Racialization
 - Exclusion
 - Colonization
 - Stigmatization
 - Victimization
-
- Next lecture we will discuss class and income inequality

