Social Stratification and Mobility

What is Stratification?

*Social stratification* is a structured ranking of individuals and groups – their grading into horizontal layers or strata.

There are two different types of stratification systems: open system and closed system. *Open system* is a stratification system, in which people can change their status with relative ease. *Closed system* is a stratification system, in which people have great difficulty in changing their status.

I think that there is a closed system in our country, because a person having nothing-valuable resources can’t change his social status. For example, ordinate engineer can’t suddenly become a bank officer with greater income. Person must have some capital, money, bank securities or intellectual capital. But, I think, nowadays there is a great tendency in our society to have more money than an intellect, i.e. money capital is more preferable than a great intellectual potential of our nation.

The study of social stratification is the study of class, caste, privilege, status that is characteristic of a particular society. It varies according to how society is organized especially in terms of production and work. We will emphasize class.

What is the connection between the question: what do you want to be when you grow up and social stratification (especially the class character of the society you live in)? Your position in society and the rewards that will be associated with it. It has an impact on your possibility of realistically meeting your opportunities for mobility. Mobility refers to the likelihood that you can achieve a class, caste different from where you come from, your roots. Mobility and stratification are related.

What image does strata invoke as a model of the social world? Strata comes the natural sciences. Dr. Brush argues that it is interesting that sociologists use a natural phenomena to talk about social phenomena. It seems to contradict the main message of the course: our world is socially constructed phenomena and not a natural process. Thus, stratification is not equal to natural accretion.

Hypothesis posed by a classmate: society needs stratification to be healthy and keep the peace. Which of the three main sociological perspectives supports this statement? The functionalist perspective. Most stratification arguments come out of this perspective. The second part of the hypothesis (to keep the peace) relates more to the conflict perspective.

Stratification and egalitarianism are related. In a sociological sense strata is a category that's associated with social hierarchy. That is, people are ranked according to their rank, class, authority. If a society has ranks then it is a stratified society. If it does not, then it is an egalitarian society. Keep in mind, that these are relative terms.

Last week we drew a picture that tells the story of how societies are organized around work. As societies move from simple to complex organization, they start to get levels of inequality that would need stratification to keep the peace. The differences are not natural, neutral nor random. They are ranked and constitute a hierarchy along the lines of race, gender, age, income among others.

Class is about how society organizes production and the outcomes that it creates for people; this a combination of a Marxian (stratification) and Weberian (organization) understanding.

Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis

Certain position in any society are functionally more important than others and require special skills for their performance.

Only a limited number of individuals in any society have the talents which can be trained into the skills appropriate to these positions.

the conversion of talents into skills involves a training period during which sacrifices of one kind or another are made by those undergoing the training.

In order to induce the talented persons to undergo these sacrifices and acquire the training, their future positions must carry an inducement value in the form of differential, i.e., privileged and disproportionate access to the scarce and desired rewards which the society has to offer.

These scarce and desired goods consist of the rights and perquisites attached to or built into, the positions, and can be classified into those things which contribute to a.) sustenance and comfort, b.) humor an diversion, c.) self-respect and ego expansion.

This differential access to the basic rewards to the society has a consequence the differentiation of the prestige and esteem which various strata acquire. This may be said, along with the rights and perquisites, to constitute institutionalized social inequality, i.e., stratification.

Therefore, social inequality among different strata in the amounts of scarce and desired goods, and the amounts of prestige and esteem, which they receive, is both positively functional and inevitable in any society.

Social mobility

*Social mobility* is a process, when individuals or groups can move from one level (stratum) to another in the stratification system. There are three types of social mobility:

*Vertical mobility* involves movement from one social status to another of higher or lower rank.

*Horizontal mobility* entails movement from one social status to another that approximately equivalent in rank.

*Integrational mobility* involves a comparison of the social status of parents and their children at the same point in their respective careers. Integrational mobility entails a comparison of the social status of a person over an extended time period.

Identifying social classes

There are three main approaches to identifying social classes: the objective method, the self-placement method, and the reputational method. Although all the approaches overlap in classes, there are appreciable differences in the results afforded by each. Moreover, each method has certain advantages and disadvantages (see Table 1).

*The objective method*. The objective method views social class as a statistical category. The categories are formed not by the members themselves, but by sociologists or statisticians. Most commonly people assigned to social classes on the basis of income, occupation, or education (or some combination of these characteristics). The label “objective” can be misleading, for it is not meant to imply that the approach is more “scientific” or “unbiased” than the others. Rather, it is objective in that numerically measurable criteria are employed for the placement of individuals.

*The self-placement method*. The self-placement method (also known as the subjective method) has people identify the social class to which they think they belong. Class is viewed as a social category, one in which people group themselves with other individuals they perceive as sharing certain attributes in common with them. The class lines may or may not conform to what social scientists think are logical lines of cleavage in the objective sense.

*The reputational method*. In the self-placement method people are asked to rank themselves. In the reputational method they are asked how they classify other individuals. This approach view class as a social group, one in which people share a feeling of oneness and are bound together in relatively stable patterns of interaction. Thus class rests on knowledge of who associates with whom.

Table 1. Identifying social classes

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Method | Advantages | Disadvantages |
| Objective | A clear-cut method for studying the correlates of social class. It is commonly the simplest and cheapest approach since data can usually be obtained from government sources. | The method often does not yield divisions that people themselves employ in their daily lives. |
| Self-placement | The method can be applied to a large population since survey techniques can be employed for securing the data. A useful method for predicting political behavior since who people think they are influences how they vote. | The class with which people identify may represent their aspirations rather than their current associations or the appraisals of other people. |
| Reputational | The method provides a valuable tool for investigating social distinctions in small groups and communities. It is specially useful for predicting associational patterns among people. | The method is difficult to use in large samples where people have little or no knowledge of one another. |

Middles rank according to profession

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Professionals | Whole amount of respondents | Middle class of Russia | Ideal middle class |
| 1. Industrial workers | 35.2 | 25.2 | 4.2 |
| 2. Technicians, middle part managers | 14.4 | 23.4 | 20.8 |
| 3. Directors of public industries and joint-stock companies | 1.2 | 2.1 | - |
| 4. Businessmen | 6.9 | 12.8 | 25.0 |
| 5. Accountant, financier etc. | 4.0 | 4.2 | 12.5 |
| 6. Humanitarian intelligence | 20.5 | 23.4 | 16.7 |
| 7. Workers of communal sphere | 10.2 | 8.5 | 20.8 |
| 8. Trade and supply workers | 7.6 | - | - |

Russian middle class: 6% of all respondents

self-identification: middle place

Financial position: sufficient to live

Education: specialized secondary education, incomplete or complete higher education

Numerical superiority: men and citizens of big towns and Moscow.

Ideal middle class: 3.4% of all respondents (most close to middle class of advanced countries)

Financial position: sufficient amount of money for almost all needs

Education: specialized secondary education or higher (50% - specialized secondary education)

Citizens of big towns (21.1%) and villages (52.7%). Thus 2-3% of villagers are of middle class.