

UNIT 3



SOCIAL INEQUALITY



Chapter 8

Social Stratification

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Enrichment Readings

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“The Lives of Homeless Women,”
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CHAPTER 8

Social Stratification



U S I N G

Your Sociological Imagination

Jane Smith, aged forty and reeling from a bitter divorce, was discouraged. A serious back injury meant she could no longer work at her nursing aide job. Without a high school diploma, she found that no one was willing to hire her. Reluctantly, she applied for welfare and was enrolled in a program designed to develop job skills. She completed an eighteen-month course and was hired by an engineering firm. After two years, Jane has moved up in the company and now thinks of herself as an intelligent, capable person.

A different type of welfare story involves Mary, the “welfare queen.” Many politicians have used her as a typical example of how the social welfare system is abused. Mary managed to register for government aid under dozens of assumed names and collected thousands of dollars from food stamps and other federally subsidized programs. With this money, she supported her drug and alcohol habits while her children were left cold and underfed.

Which welfare case do you believe is typical? Your answer depends a lot on your social class and such characteristics as age, education, politics, and income. Sociologists know that most Americans seriously overestimate both the amount of welfare fraud and the amount of money spent on welfare. At the same time, negative attitudes about welfare recipients have become part of the American culture. This chapter will look at attitudes and behaviors of different social classes.

Sections

1. Dimensions of Stratification
2. Explanations of Stratification
3. Social Classes in America
4. Poverty in America
5. Social Mobility

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

- ❖ explain the relationship between stratification and social class.
- ❖ compare and contrast the three dimensions of stratification.
- ❖ state the differences among the three major perspectives on social stratification.
- ❖ identify the distinguishing characteristics of the major social classes in America.
- ❖ describe the measurement and extent of poverty in the United States.
- ❖ discuss social mobility in the United States.



Chapter Overview

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Section

1

Dimensions of Stratification

Key Terms

- social stratification
- social class
- bourgeoisie
- proletariat
- income
- wealth
- power
- prestige

Section Preview

Stratification is the division of society into classes that have unequal amounts of wealth, power, and prestige. Karl Marx and Max Weber studied these dimensions of stratification in great detail.

Social Stratification and Social Class

In one of his best-known children's books, Dr. Seuss writes of the Sneetches, birds whose rank depends on whether or not they have a large star on their stomachs. Star-bellied Sneetches have high status, and plain-bellied Sneetches have low status. In the classic novel



In George Orwell's Animal Farm, the animals overthrew their human master to form their own soon-to-be stratified society.

Animal Farm, George Orwell creates a barnyard society where the pigs ultimately take over the previously classless animal society. The animals' motto changes from "All animals are equal" to "All animals are equal—but some animals are more equal than others." Both books mock the tendency of humans to form ranks. **Social stratification** is the creation of layers (or strata) of people who possess unequal shares of scarce resources. The most important of these resources are income, wealth, power, and prestige (Levine, 1998).

How is social stratification related to social class? Each of the layers in a stratification system is a **social class**—a segment of a population whose members hold similar amounts of scarce resources and share values, norms, and an identifiable lifestyle. The number of social classes in a society varies. Technologically developed countries generally have three broad classes—upper, middle, and lower—subdivided into smaller categories. In some developing countries, there might only be an upper class and a lower class.

Karl Marx and Max Weber made the most significant early contributions to the study of social stratification. (See Chapter 1, pages 16–18 for an introduction to these two pioneers of sociology.) Marx explained the importance of the economic foundations of social classes, while Weber emphasized the prestige and power aspects of stratification.

social stratification
ranking of people or groups according to their unequal access to scarce resources

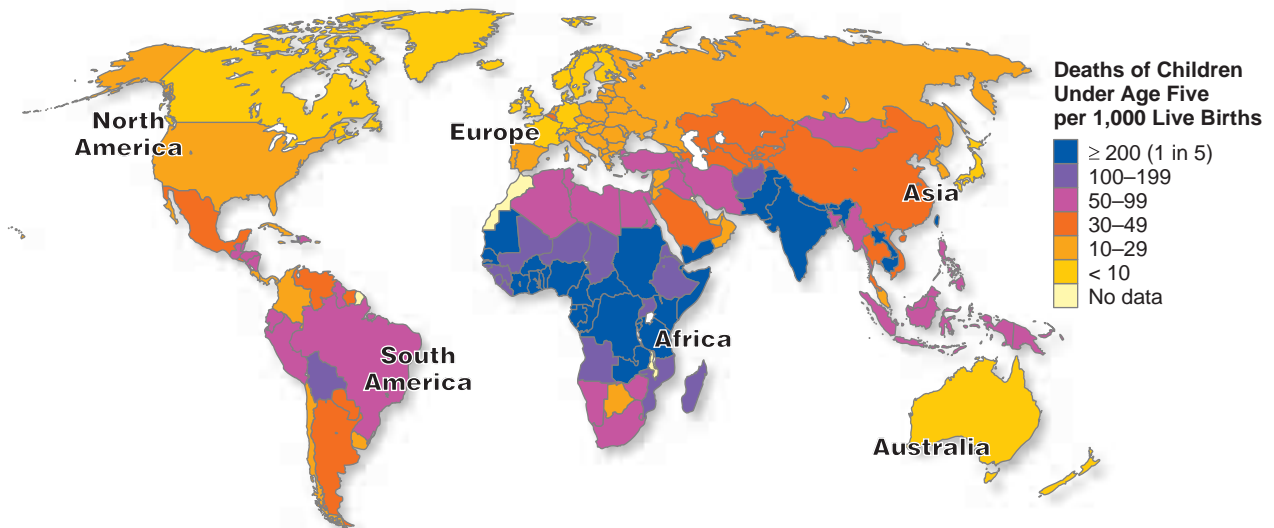
social class
segment of society whose members hold similar amounts of resources and share values, norms, and an identifiable lifestyle

World View



Poverty and Death

Receiving basic nutrition and medical care is critical to survival in the early years of human life. Because wealth and income have a significant impact on a family's ability to provide these necessities of life, extreme poverty matters a great deal. This map shows the number of deaths of children less than five years old per 1,000 live births in each country.



Interpreting the Map

1. Do you see a pattern in the death rates for children under five years old? Explain.
2. Why do you think the U.S. ranks higher than some countries in Europe?
3. Imagine you have the job of reducing the world's death rate among children under age five. What programs would you introduce?

Adapted from *The State of the World Atlas*, 5th ed.

The Economic Dimension

Marx identified several social classes in nineteenth-century industrial society, including laborers, servants, factory workers, craftspeople, proprietors of small businesses, and moneyed capitalists. He predicted, however, that capitalist societies would ultimately be reduced to two social classes. He thought that those who owned the means of production—the **bourgeoisie**—would be the rulers. Those who worked for wages—the **proletariat**—would be the ruled. Marx predicted that because the capitalists owned the means of production (factories, land, and so forth), they would both rule and exploit the working class. The working class would have nothing to sell but its labor.

bourgeoisie
class that owns the means of production

proletariat
class that labors without owning the means of production

income

amount of money received by an individual or group over a specific time period

wealth

total economic resources held by a person or group

Marx believed that control of the economy gave the capitalists control over the legal, educational, and government systems as well. For Karl Marx, the economy determined the nature of society.

Are there extremes of income and poverty in the United States? In his writings, Marx emphasized the unequal distribution of economic resources. How unequally are these resources distributed in the United States? When discussing this issue, economists often make a distinction between income and wealth. **Income** is the amount of money received within a given time period by an individual or group. **Wealth** refers to all the economic resources possessed by an individual or group. In brief, your income is your paycheck, and your wealth is what you own.

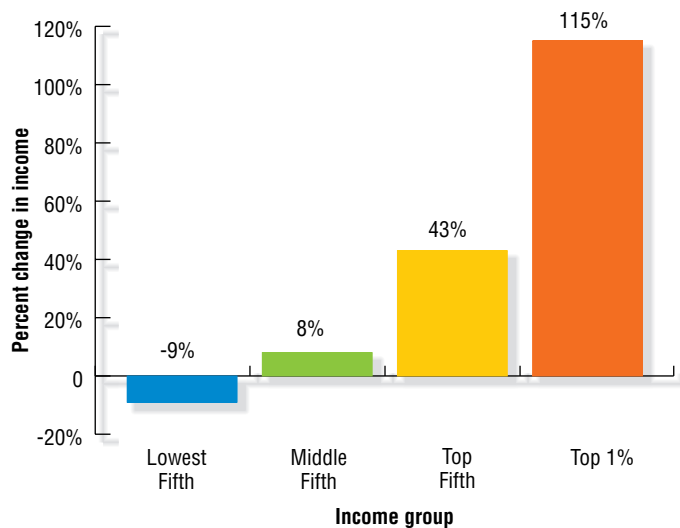


Figure 8.1 Percentage Change in After-Tax Income 1977 to 1999. To what percentages do the labels Lowest, Middle, and Top Fifth refer?

Sources: Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1999.

In 1999, over 32 million Americans were living in poverty. (In 2000, the poverty level was set at \$17,603 for a family of four.) At the other extreme, there were about 5 million millionaire households and around 260 billionaires in the United States. The economist Paul Samuelson described income inequality in America in these words: “If we made an income pyramid out of a child’s blocks, with each layer portraying \$500 of income, the peak would be far higher than Mt. Everest, but most people would be within a few feet of the ground” (Samuelson and Nordhaus, 1995). The truth in Samuelson’s statement is supported by government figures on the distribution of income. In 1999, the richest 20 percent of American households received over 49 percent of the nation’s income. The poorest 20 percent received under 4 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census).

Income inequality exists and is growing. Figure 8.1 charts percentage changes in after-tax income in the United States over a twenty-two year period. During this period, the income



“Actually, Lou, I think it was more than just my being in the right place at the right time. I think it was my being the right race, the right religion, the right sex, the right socioeconomic group, having the right accent, the right clothes, going to the right schools...”

This cartoon is illustrating what sociologists have confirmed—usually, those who have, get.

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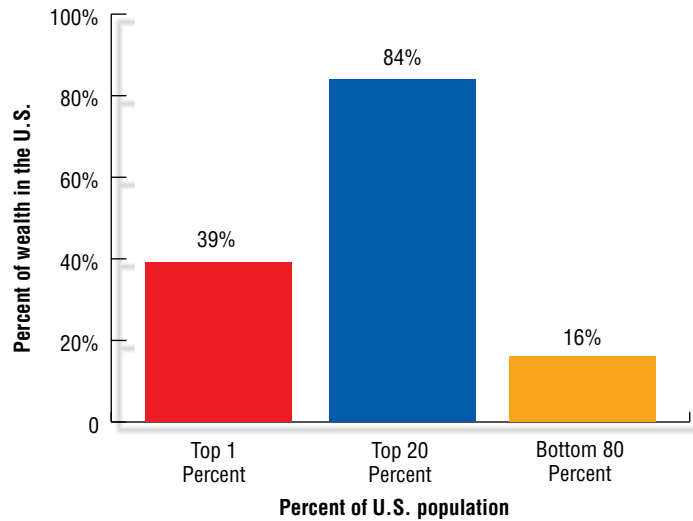


Figure 8.2 Shares of Wealth.

Is this picture of the distribution of wealth different from what you would expect? Explain.

Source: Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1999.

of the top 1 percent of the population increased by 115 percent. Compare this to a 9 percent decline for the lowest fifth of the population. How much inequality in wealth exists in the United States?

Income distribution figures reveal economic inequality, but they do not show the full extent of inequality. For that, inequality in wealth (what you own) must be considered. In the United States, there is a high concentration of wealth. The richest 20 percent of the population holds 84 percent of the wealth. The top 1 percent alone has 39 percent of the total wealth in the United States. (See Figure 8.2)

The Power Dimension

You will recall from Chapter 1 that **power** is the ability to control the behavior of others, even against their will. Individuals or groups who possess power are able to use it to enhance their own interests, often—but not necessarily—at the expense of society.

power
the ability to control the behavior of others, even against their will

Can you exercise power without being wealthy? According to Marx, those who own and control capital have the power in a society. Weber, on the other hand, argued that while having money certainly helps, economic success and power are not the same. Money and ownership of the means of production are not the only resources that can be used as a basis for power. Expert knowledge can be used to expand power, too. For example, many lawyers convert their expertise into substantial amounts of political power. Fame is another basis for power. In 1952, for example, Albert Einstein was offered the presidency of Israel. (He refused, saying, “I know a little about nature, and hardly anything about men.”)

Power is also attached to the social positions we hold. Elected officers in organizations have more power than rank-and-file members. People in top executive positions in the mass media are powerful, even if they themselves do not have great wealth. People who are wealthy and powerful also are assumed to have characteristics they may not have. Not all of these people are as intelligent and wise as is usually assumed. Still, these attributed characteristics help them gain prestige.



Jesse Jackson has channeled his intense interest in civil rights into the exercise of power on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged.



Finally, we can overcome a lack of wealth if we have large numbers of people on our side or if we are skillful at organizing our resources. Hitler, for example, was able to turn the problem of limited resources into a mass political movement. He gained absolute power by promising to deliver Germany from economic hardship following World War I.

The Prestige Dimension

prestige
recognition, respect, and
admiration attached to social
positions

A third dimension of social stratification is **prestige**—recognition, respect, and admiration attached to social positions. Prestige is defined by your culture and society. Honor, admiration, respect, and deference are extended to dons within the Mafia, for example; but outside their own circles Mafia chiefs do not have high prestige.



Popular actors such as Julia Roberts and Will Smith have considerable wealth. Their prestige rating is stronger in some circles than others, however.



Occupations	Prestige Score	Occupations	Prestige Score	Occupations	Prestige Score
Surgeon	87	Police officer	61	Automobile dealer	43
Astronaut	80	Actor	60	Deep-sea diver	43
Lawyer	75	Journalist	60	Landlord	41
College professor	74	TV anchorman	60	Prison guard	40
Airline pilot	73	Businessperson	60	Auto mechanic	40
Dentist	72	Actress	59	Roofer	37
Priest	71	Nursery school teacher	55	Barber	36
Engineer	71	Fashion designer	55	Sales clerk in a store	36
TV anchorwoman	70	Firefighter	53	Bus driver	32
Secret Service agent	70	Airplane mechanic	53	Dry cleaner	32
School principal	69	Commercial artist	52	Waitress	29
Medical technician	68	Housewife	51	Taxicab driver	28
Optometrist	67	Funeral director	49	Used car salesperson	25
Registered nurse	66	Jazz musician	48	Bill collector	24
High school teacher	66	Mail carrier	47	Janitor	22
Air traffic controller	65	Insurance agent	46	Grocery bagger	18
Professional athlete	65	Mechanic	46	Street-corner drug dealer	13
Paramedic	64	Disc jockey	45	Fortune teller	13
Public grade school teacher	64	Photographer	45	Panhandler	11
Advertising executive	63	Plumber	45		
Veterinarian	62	Bank teller	43		

Figure 8.3 Prestige Rankings of Selected Occupations in the United States.

Why do you think the highest listed prestige score is 87? What occupations might rate a higher score?

Prestige must be voluntarily given, not claimed. Scientists cannot proclaim themselves Nobel Prize winners; journalists cannot award themselves Pulitzer Prizes; and corporate executives cannot grant themselves honorary doctorates. Recognition must come from others.

People with similar levels of prestige share identifiable lifestyles. The offspring of upper-class families are more likely to attend private universities and Episcopal churches. Children from lower-class homes are less likely to attend college at all and tend to belong to fundamentalist religious groups. In fact, some sociologists view social classes as subcultures because their members participate in distinctive ways of life.

How is prestige distributed? The social positions that are considered the most important, or are valued the most highly, have the most prestige. Because Americans value the acquisition of wealth and power, they tend to assign higher prestige to persons in positions of wealth and power.

In America, most people achieve prestige because of their occupations. (See Figure 8.3.) White-collar occupations (doctors, ministers, schoolteachers) have higher prestige than blue-collar jobs (carpenters, plumbers, mechanics). Even though wealth and power usually determine prestige, that is not always the case. You may find it somewhat surprising, for example, that priests and college professors have more prestige than bankers.

“All wealth is power, so power must infallibly draw wealth to itself by some means or other.”

Edmund Burke
British statesman

Associate each of these people with a prestige level. If an occupation is not obvious, choose a likely one for that person. Can the young girl even be ranked?



Section 1 Assessment

1. What is social stratification?
2. Match the dimensions of stratifications with the examples below. Use (W) for wealth, (Po) for power, and (Pr) for prestige.
 - a. the respect accorded doctors
 - b. a politician considering the interests of a lobby
 - c. the Nobel Peace Prize
 - d. stock market holdings
 - e. a Supreme Court ruling
 - f. real estate assets
3. The top 20 percent of U.S. households receive approximately what percent of the total income?
4. What are the most common sources of prestige in U.S. society?

Critical Thinking

5. **Analyzing Information** Social class level influences the likelihood of gaining political power. Can you analyze the relationship between social class level and political power?

Another Time

You Are What You Wear

Social rank in Europe in the Middle Ages was reflected, as it is today, in clothing and accessories. The following excerpt describes some of the norms associated with dress and status.

Clothing [in medieval Europe] served as a kind of uniform, designating status. Lepers were required to wear gray coats and red hats, the skirts of prostitutes had to be scarlet, released heretics carried crosses sewn on both sides of their chests—you were expected to pray as you passed them—and the breast of every Jew, as [required] by law, bore a huge yellow circle.

The rest of society belonged to one of the three great classes: the nobility, the clergy, and the com-

mons. Establishing one's social identity was important. Each man knew his place, believed it had been [determined] in heaven, and was aware that what he wore must reflect it.

To be sure, certain fashions were shared by all. Styles had changed since Greece and Rome shimmered in their glory; then garments had been wrapped on; now all classes put them on and fastened them. Most clothing—except the leather gauntlets and leggings of hunters, and the crude animal skins worn by the very poor—was now woven of wool. (Since few Europeans possessed a change of clothes, the same [dress] was worn daily; as a consequence, skin diseases were astonishingly prevalent.) But there was no mistaking the distinctions between the parson in his vestments; the toiler in his dirty cloth tunic, loose trousers, and heavy boots; and the aristocrat with his jewelry, his hairdress, and his extravagant finery. Every knight wore a signet ring, and wearing fur was as much a sign of knighthood as wearing a sword or carrying a falcon. Indeed, in some European states it was illegal for anyone not nobly born to adorn himself with fur. “Many a petty noble,” wrote historian W. S. Davis, “will cling to his frayed tippet of black lambskin, even in the hottest weather, merely to prove that he is not a villein [a type of serf].”

Source: Excerpted from *A World Lit Only by Fire*, © 1992 by William Manchester. By permission of Little, Brown and Company. Reprinted by permission of Don Congdon Associates, Inc. © 1993 by William Manchester.

Thinking It Over

Think about how you and your classmates dress. Identify some ways in which differences in dress reflect social status in your school.



Clothing in medieval society was strictly regulated.

Section 2

Explanations of Stratification

Key Term

- false consciousness

Section Preview

Each of the three perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism—explains stratification in society in a different way.

Functionalist Theory of Stratification

According to the functionalists, stratification assures that the most qualified people fill the most important positions, that these qualified people perform their tasks competently, and that they are rewarded for their efforts. The functionalist theory recognizes that inequality exists because certain jobs are more important than others and that these jobs often involve special talent and training. To encourage people to make the sacrifices necessary to fill these jobs (such as acquiring the necessary education), society attaches special monetary rewards and prestige to the positions. That is why, for example, doctors make more money and have more prestige than bus drivers. A higher level of skill is required in the medical profession, and our society's need for highly qualified doctors is great.

Conflict Theory of Stratification

According to the conflict theory of stratification, inequality exists because some people are willing to exploit others. Stratification, from this perspective, is based on force rather than on people voluntarily agreeing to it.

The conflict theory of stratification is based on Marx's ideas regarding class conflict. For Marx, all of history has been a class struggle between the powerful and the powerless, the exploiters and the exploited. Capitalist society is the final stage of the class struggle. Although the capitalists are outnumbered, they are able to control the workers. This is because the capitalists use a belief system that legitimizes the way things are. For example, the powerful contend that income and wealth are based on ability, hard work, and individual effort.

Those who own the means of production are able to spread their ideas, beliefs, and values through the schools, the media, the churches, and the government. (More will be said about how this might happen in the next section.) Marx used the term **false consciousness** to refer to working-class acceptance of capitalist ideas and values.

false consciousness

adoption of the ideas of the dominant class by the less powerful class



How would functionalists explain the different places of these people on the stratification structure?

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Later conflict sociologists have proposed that stratification is based more on power than on property ownership. America's legal system, for example, is used by the wealthy for their benefit, and the political system is skewed toward the interests of the powerful. For followers of the conflict perspective, stratification occurs through the struggle for scarce resources.

Symbolic Interactionism and Stratification

Symbolic interactionism helps us understand how people are socialized to accept the existing stratification structure. According to this perspective, American children are taught that a person's social class is the result of talent and effort. Those "on top" have worked hard and used their abilities, whereas those "on the bottom" lack the talent or the motivation to succeed. Hence, it is not fair to challenge the system. In this way, people come to accept the existing system.

Understandably, people in the lower social classes or social strata tend to suffer from lower self-esteem. How could it be otherwise when messages from all sides tell them they are inferior? Remember that, in the symbolic interactionist view, self-esteem is based on how we think others see us. In other words, the looking-glass process is at work. Those at the top blame the victims; the victims blame themselves. (See pages 116–117 for an explanation of the looking-glass self.)

The reverse is true for the higher classes. Those profiting most from the stratification structure tend to have higher self-esteem. This, in turn, fuels their conviction that the present arrangement is just. In short, people's self-concepts also help preserve the status quo.



These South Dakotans are protesting the unequal treatment of Native Americans in the criminal justice system. How could the protestors use conflict theory to support their viewpoint?



It isn't always easy being out of the "in-group."

Figure 8.4 Focus on Theoretical Perspectives

Social Stratification. This table summarizes what issues of social stratification might be of interest to each of the major perspectives and predictions that they would make. Why would the symbolic interactionists be more likely than the functionalists to look at issues of self-esteem?

Theoretical Perspective	Research Topic	Expected Result
Functionalism	Relationship between job performance and pay	Pay levels increase with job performance.
Conflict Theory	Relationship between social class and the likelihood of punishment for a crime	The chances for prosecution decrease as the level of social class increases.
Symbolic Interactionism	Link between social class and self-esteem	Self-esteem is higher among the upper class than the lower class.



Section 2 Assessment

- Identify which of the major perspectives describes the examples below.
 - Corporate executives make more money because they decide who gets what in their organizations.
 - Engineers make more money than butlers because of their education.
 - Poor children tend to have low self-esteem.
- How did Marx explain the stratification of society?
- According to the symbolic interactionists, people are socialized to accept the existing stratification structure through _____.
 - the "I"
 - evolution
 - conflict
 - the self-concept

Critical Thinking

- Making Comparisons** Compare and contrast the explanations given by functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism for the existence of poor people in the United States.



Focus on Research

Field Research: Who's Popular, Who's Not?

In 1995, sociologist Donna Eder and her research team studied popularity among middle-schoolers. They observed lunchtime interactions and attended extracurricular activities. After several months of observation, informal interviews were conducted with individuals and groups. To capture interaction for closer study, the researchers received student and parental permission for audio and video recordings.

Eder and her colleagues found that in the sixth grade, there were no elite groups. Seventh and eighth graders, however, did not see each other as equals; popular seventh graders were divided along gender lines. By the eighth grade, the two groups intermingled. In both grades, popularity was based on how many others knew who you were and wanted to talk with you.

Status differences could arise in the seventh and eighth grades because cheerleading and team sports existed as a way to become highly visible. Realizing the source of their prestige, male athletes took every opportunity to display symbols of their team affiliation. Team uniforms, jerseys, and athletic shoes were among the most important items of dress. Bandages, casts, and crutches were worn with pride.

Girls could not use sports to gain visibility because female athletics were not as valued by faculty, administrators, or students. Girls, therefore, used cheerleading to make themselves widely known. In addition to performing at basketball and football games, cheerleaders appeared in front of the entire student body at pep rallies and other school events.

Boys made fun of this high-status female activity by mockingly imitating cheers. One male coach joined the mockery by telling football players that either they must practice harder or he would get them cheerleading skirts. He then pretended to cheer in a falsetto voice.

Girls, in contrast, regarded cheerleaders highly. Popular girls in the seventh and eighth grades were either cheerleaders or friends of cheerleaders. Flaunting their status (just as the male athletes did), cheerleaders put on their uniforms as far ahead of games as possible and wore their cheerleading skirts for extracurricular school activities.



For adolescent males, playing sports is a way to become popular.

Working with the Research

Which of the three major theoretical perspectives best explains the stratification structure described in this feature? Give reasons for your choice.



Section 3

Social Classes in America

Key Terms

- class consciousness
- working poor
- underclass

Section Preview

Sociologists have identified several social classes in the United States. They include the upper class, the middle class, the working class and the working poor, and the underclass.

class consciousness
identification with the goals and interests of a social class

Class Consciousness

Americans have always been aware of inequality, but they have never developed a sense of **class consciousness**—a sense of identification with the goals and interests of the members of a particular social class. In part because the American public has shown relatively little interest in class differences, sociologists began to investigate inequality rather late. It was not until the 1920s that sociologists in the United States began systematically to identify social classes. Since that time, however, research on this subject has been plentiful. Early efforts to study stratification were mostly case studies of specific communities. Only in relatively recent times have attempts been made to describe the stratification structure of America as a whole.

Since social classes are changeable and full of exceptions, any attempt to identify the social-class structure of American society is hazardous. Nevertheless, sociologists have described some of the major classifications. (See Figure 8.5.)

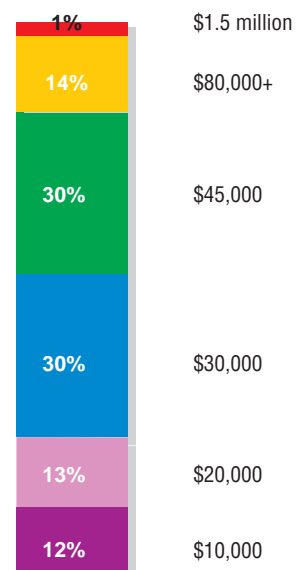
Figure 8.5 American Class Structure. *What does this chart of the American class structure indicate about stratification in the U.S.?*

Source: Adapted from Dennis Gilbert, *The American Class Structure*, 1998.

Typical Occupations

Upper Class	Investors, heirs, chief executive officers
Upper Middle Class	Upper-level managers, professionals, owners of medium-sized businesses
Middle Class	Lower-level managers, semiprofessionals, craftspeople, foremen, non-retail salespeople, clerical
Working Class	Low-skill manual, clerical, and retail sales workers
Working Poor	Lowest-paid manual, retail, and service workers
Underclass	Unemployed people, people in part-time menial jobs, people receiving public assistance

Typical Incomes



The Upper Class

The upper class includes only 1 percent of the population (Gilbert, 1998) and may be divided into the upper-upper class and the lower-upper class. At the top is the “aristocracy.” Its members represent the old-money families whose names appear in high society—Ford, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, and du Pont, among others. The basis for membership in this most elite of clubs is blood rather than sweat and tears. Parents in this class send their children to the best private schools and universities. People in this group seldom marry outside their class.

People are in the lower-upper class more often because of achievement and earned income than because of birth and inherited wealth. Some have made fortunes running large corporations or investing in the stock market. Members of this class may actually be better off financially than members of the upper-upper class. However, they often are not accepted into the most exclusive social circles.




Upper-class people tend to shop at upscale stores such as Saks and Company.

The Middle Classes

Most Americans think of themselves as middle class. In reality, though, only about 40 to 50 percent of Americans fit this description. And most of these people are not in the upper-middle class.

The upper-middle class (14 percent of the population) is composed of those who have been successful in business, the professions, politics, and the military. Basically, this class is made up of individuals and families who benefited





Student Web Activity
Visit the *Sociology and You Web* site at soc.glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 8—Student Web Activities** for an activity on social class.



This family fulfills the American image of comfortable middle-class living.



from the tremendous corporate and professional expansion following World War II. Members of this class earn enough to live well and to save money. They are typically college educated and have high educational and career goals for their children. They do not have national or international power, but they tend to be active in voluntary and political organizations in their communities.

The middle-middle class (30 percent of the population) is a very mixed bag. Its members include owners of small businesses and farms; independent professionals (small-town doctors and lawyers); other professionals (clergy, teachers, nurses, firefighters, social workers, police officers); lower-level managers; and some sales and clerical workers. Their income level, which is at about the national average (\$21,181 in 1999), does not permit them to live as well as the upper-middle class. Many have only a high school education, although many have some college, and some have college degrees. Members of this class are interested in civic affairs. They participate in political activities less than the classes above them but more than either the working class or the lower class.



The upper class is a nation's past; the middle class is its future.

Ayn Rand
novelist



The Working Class

The working class (often referred to as the lower-middle class) comprises almost one-third of the population. Working class people include roofers, delivery truck drivers, machine operators, and salespeople and clerical workers (Rubin, 1994). Although some of these workers may earn more than some middle-class people, in general the economic resources of the working class are lower than those of the middle class.

Members of the working class have below-average income and unstable employment. They generally lack hospital insurance and retirement benefits. The threat of unemployment or illness is real and haunting. Outside of union activities, members of the working class have little opportunity to exercise power or participate in organizations. Members of the working class—even those with higher incomes—are not likely to enter the middle class.

The Working Poor

The **working poor** (13 percent of the population) consists of people employed in low-skill jobs with the lowest pay. Its members are typically the lowest-level clerical workers, manual workers (laborers), and service workers (fast-food servers). Lacking steady employment, the working poor do not earn enough to rise above the poverty line (\$17,603 for a family of four in 2000). The working poor tend not to belong to organizations or to participate in the political process. (See also Enrichment Reading: No Shame in My Game on page 460 in Chapter 13.)

The Underclass

The **underclass** (12 percent of the population) is composed of people who are usually unemployed and who come from families with a history of unemployment for generations. They either work in part-time menial jobs (unloading trucks, picking up litter) or are on public assistance. In addition

working poor

people employed in low-skill jobs with the lowest pay who do not earn enough to rise out of poverty

underclass

people typically unemployed who came from families that have been poor for generations





This Navajo single mother belongs to the underclass, America's poorest.

to a lack of education and skills, many members of the underclass have other problems. Physical or mental disabilities are common, and many are single mothers with little or no income.

The most common shared characteristic of the working poor and the underclass is a lack of skills to obtain jobs that pay enough to meet basic needs. There are many routes into these classes—birth, old age, loss of a marriage partner, lack of education or training, alcoholism, physical or mental disability. There are, however, very few paths out. Poverty in the United States, another way to discuss the working poor and the underclass, is the topic of the next section.

Section 3 Assessment

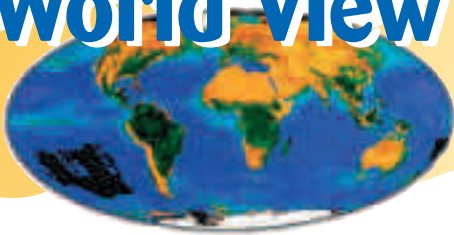
1. Statistically, out of 500 people, how many would belong to the upper class?
2. What is a major distinction between members of the upper-middle and the middle-middle classes?
3. Which class is the largest segment of society?

Critical Thinking

4. **Summarizing Information** Chapter 5 discussed the concept of status. How does ascribed status relate to social class? How does achieved status relate to social class?

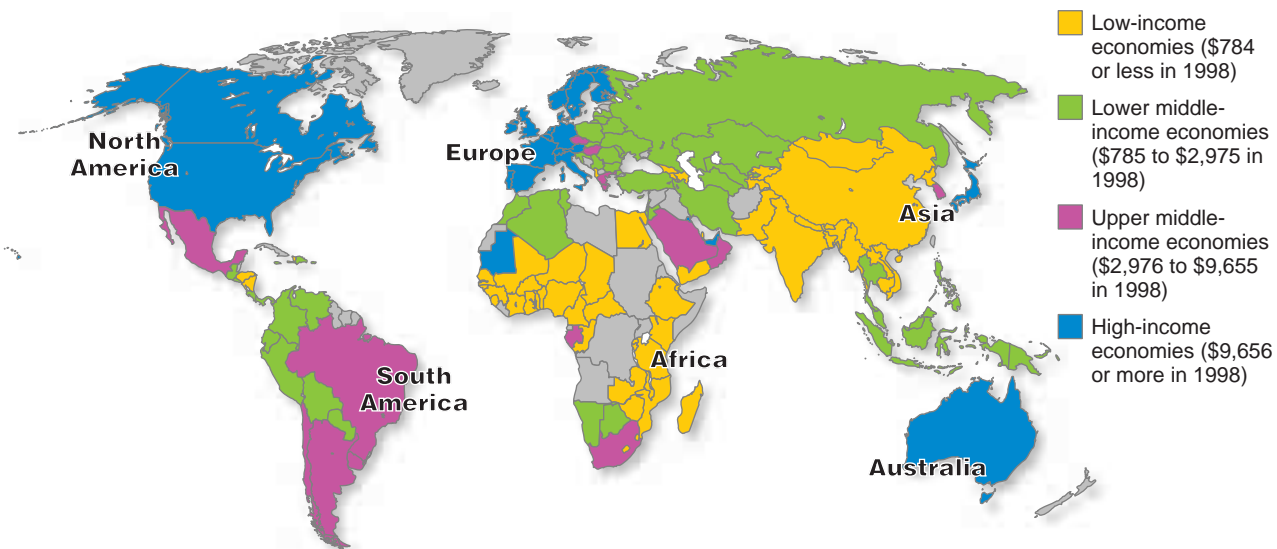


World View



Social Classes in World Perspective

The World Bank, whose business it is to dispense economic advice and loans to low- and middle-income countries, continuously monitors income levels around the world. The map below displays the World Bank's classification of countries in terms of per capita income. For example, the United States is one of the few nations with a "high-income" economy—one that has a gross national product (GNP) per capita of over \$9,655.



Interpreting the Map

1. Explain the definitions of the four income groups.
2. Identify two countries within each of the four income categories.
3. Why do you think the U.S. is one of the few countries to fall within the high-income category?
4. Compare poverty in the United States to poverty in low-income economies.

Source: World Bank, 1999.

Section 4

Poverty in America

Key Terms

- absolute poverty
- relative poverty
- feminization of poverty

Measuring Poverty

Absolute poverty is the absence of enough money to secure life's necessities—enough food, a safe place to live, and so forth. It is possible, however, to have the things required to remain alive and still be poor. We measure **relative poverty** by comparing the economic condition of those at the bottom of a society with the economic conditions of other members of that society. According to this measure, the definition of poverty can vary. It would not, for example, be the same in India as in the United States.

How is poverty measured in the United States? Historically, the United States government has measured poverty by setting an annual income level and considering people poor if their income is below that level. As noted earlier, in 2000 that figure was \$17,603 for a family of four.

How many Americans are poor? Poverty is widespread throughout the United States. According to 2000 U.S. Census Bureau reports, the poor comprise 11.8 percent of the American population, or more than 32.2 million people. Great poverty existed when it became a national political and social issue in the 1960s. Forty years later, poverty in America is still a problem (Newman, 1999). (See Figure 8.6 on page 260.)

Section Preview

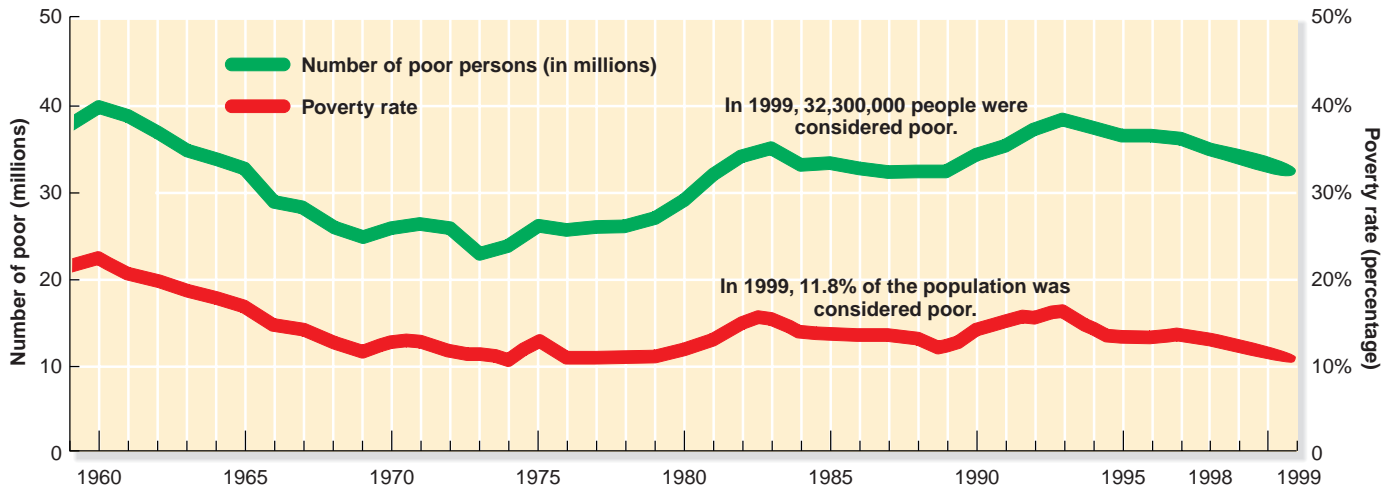
Poverty can be measured in absolute or relative terms. The poor in the U.S. are disproportionately represented by African Americans, Latinos, women, and children.

absolute poverty
the absence of enough money to secure life's necessities

relative poverty
a measure of poverty based on the economic disparity between those at the bottom of a society and the rest of the society

From the slums of Calcutta to a project in the United States, what do these photos say about the relativity of poverty?





Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Poverty in the United States: 1999, 2000*.

Figure 8.6 Number of Poor and Poverty Rate: 1959–1999. This graph shows two types of information: (1) the number of poor in the total population and (2) the poverty rate as a percentage of the total population. Why is it often helpful to have related information plotted on the same graph?

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Poverty in the United States: 1999, 2000*.

Identifying the Poor

Minorities, female-headed households, children under eighteen years of age, elderly people, people with disabilities, and people who live alone or with nonrelatives make up the most disadvantaged groups in the United States.

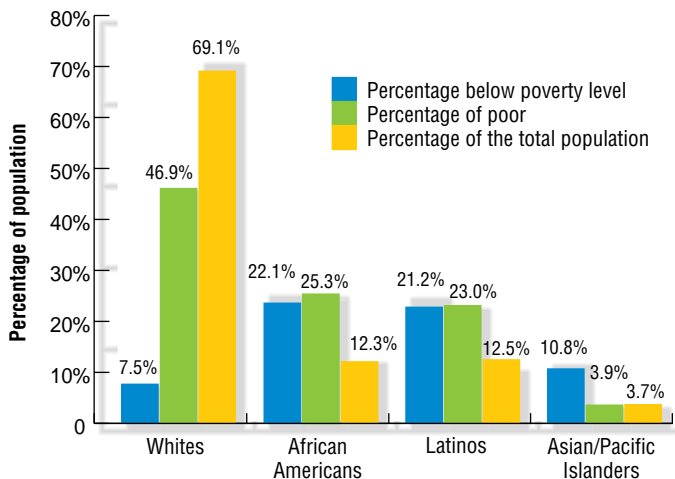
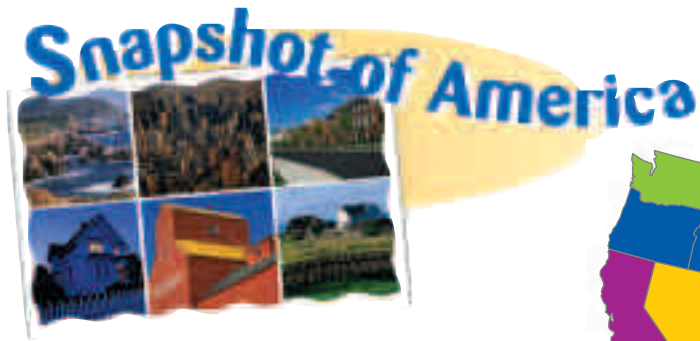


Figure 8.7 The Distribution of Poverty in the U.S. What are the most important conclusions you would reach from this figure?

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000.

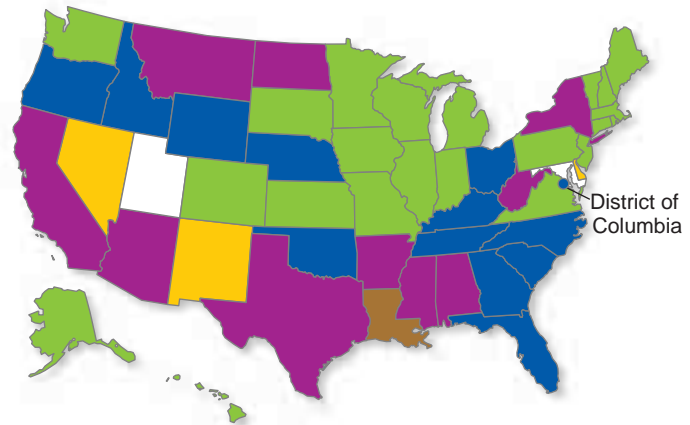
How are race and ethnicity related to poverty? About 47 percent of the poor in America today are non-Latino white. The poverty rate for African Americans and Latinos is much higher than that for whites, however. The poverty rate for whites is 7.5 percent; for African Americans and Latinos about 23 percent. African Americans and Latinos together account for only about one-fourth of the total population, but they make up nearly half of the poor population. (See Figure 8.7.)

How are gender and age related to poverty? Another large segment of the poor population is made up of female-headed households. We can look at this issue in two different ways. We can look at all poor households as a group and determine what proportion of them are headed by females. When we do this, we find that nearly one-half of poor households are female headed. In contrast, when we look at nonpoor households, we find that only about 14 percent are headed by females. Another approach would be to look at all female-headed households as a group and determine what proportion of them are poor. We find that the poverty rate for these households is about 25 percent, compared with just under 10 percent for all families.



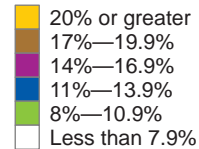
Percentage of Population in Poverty

Although the U.S. economy is booming, some people are concerned that many have not benefited from this prosperity. In fact, many people still live in poverty. This map shows the percentage of the poor by state.



Source: *The World Almanac of the U.S.A.*, Allan Carpenter and Carl Provorse, Mahwah, NJ: World Almanac Books, 2001.

Percentage of Population in Poverty



Interpreting the Map

1. Can you make any generalization about poverty from this map?
2. If you were the governor of your state, what would your platform on poverty be? Be specific.

Adapted from *The World Almanac of the U.S.A.*, 2001.

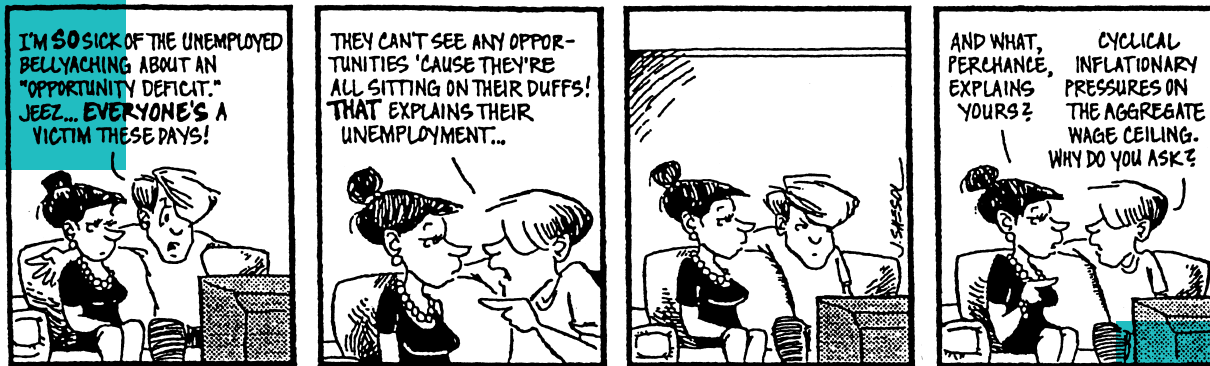
By either measure, then, households headed by females are poorer than those headed by males. A related factor is the poverty rate for children under six years of age. The current rate for this group is about 22 percent—the highest rate for any age group in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999a). The high poverty rates for women and children reflect a trend in U.S. society. Between 1960 and today, women and children make up a larger proportion of the poor. Sociologists refer to this trend as the **feminization of poverty** (*The State of America's Children*, 1998).

There are several reasons why women have a higher risk of being poor. As we discuss in more detail in Chapter 10 (see pages 323–324), women earn only about \$.72 for every dollar earned by men. Women with children find it more difficult to find and keep regular, long-term employment. A lack of good child-care facilities adds to the likelihood that they will not be able to continue working.

Older Americans account for another large segment of the poor. About 9 percent of people aged sixty-five or older live in poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000b). Another large segment of the poor are people with disabilities—those who are blind, deaf, or otherwise disabled. This group accounts for some 12 percent of America's poor. Finally, more than one out of every four poor persons lives either alone or with nonrelatives.

feminization of poverty
a trend in U.S. society in which women and children make up an increasing proportion of the poor





Blaming the victim is easy. Accepting blame is harder.

Responses to the Problem of Poverty

Before the mid-1960s, fighting poverty was not a major goal of the federal government. Some programs, such as Social Security and Aid to Families with Dependent Children, had been enacted during the Great Depression. These measures did not usually reach the lowest levels of needy citizens, however. Finally in 1964, President Lyndon Johnson marshalled the forces of the federal government to begin a War on Poverty.

What were the goals of the War on Poverty? The philosophy behind the War on Poverty was to help poor people help themselves (Patterson, 1986; Jacoby, 1997; Barry, 1999). President Johnson's predecessor, President John F. Kennedy, believed that if the chains of poverty were to be broken, it had to be through self-improvement, not temporary relief. Accordingly, almost 60 percent of the first poverty budget was earmarked for youth opportunity programs and the work experience program (work and job training designed primarily for welfare recipients and unemployed fathers).

Hopes for positive results from the War on Poverty were high. However, not all of the programs were as successful as predicted. Indeed, some have come under severe criticism. These criticisms center around supposed widespread abuses and the fear that the system encourages people to become dependent upon the government longer than is necessary. "Fixing" the way social welfare should be provided and payments should be distributed has been the focus of many hot political debates.

Welfare Reform

In 1999, actual spending for education, training, employment, and social services was \$56 billion, or 3 percent of total U.S. government expenditures. Payments for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was less than 1 percent of the federal budget.



Wealth is conspicuous,
but poverty hides.

James Reston
American journalist



What is the nature of welfare reform?

The most recent legislation on welfare reform, enacted in 1996, limits the amount of time those able to work can receive welfare payments. The bill has three major elements: it reduces welfare spending, it increases state and local power to oversee welfare rules, and it adds new restrictions on welfare eligibility. For example, benefits to children of unwed teenage mothers are denied unless the mothers remain in school and live with an adult. Cash aid to able-bodied adults will be terminated if they fail to get a job after two years.

Has welfare reform worked? It is too early to give a final evaluation of this latest attempt at welfare reform. But a recent major study indicates that the welfare rolls have decreased more dramatically than most predicted (Loprest, 1999). Just over seven million people were on welfare in 1999, down from over twelve million in 1996 when the welfare bill was signed. Well over half of those leaving the welfare rolls report finding jobs. Only a small percentage of recipients have been removed from the rolls because of the new time limits on benefits.

There is a darker side, however. Most of those leaving the rolls since 1996 hold entry-level jobs—in restaurants, cleaning services, and retail stores—earning less than \$7 per hour. Despite extraordinary national economic prosperity, most of those leaving public assistance are at the bottom of the economy with little hope of advancing. One-fourth work at night, and over half report child-care problems. Most have jobs without health insurance. A substantial minority report a food shortage and difficulty paying rent. In short, many of those leaving welfare still live in poverty. The true test of the success of welfare reform will come in a few years when the economy weakens, when we get down to the harder cases still on the rolls, and when the last time limits take effect for the more difficult cases (Rosin and Harris, 1999).

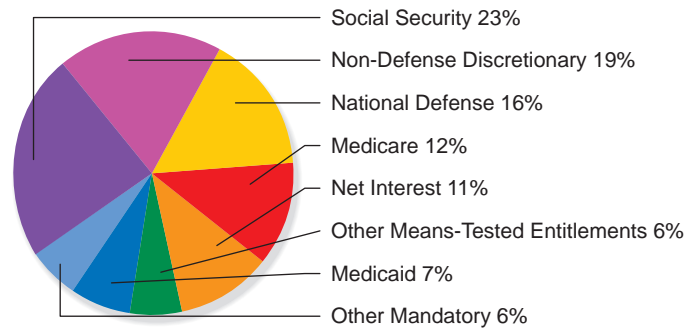


Figure 8.8 The Federal Government Dollar—Where It Goes. *Where is the largest share of the federal dollar spent?*

Source: “A Citizen’s Guide to the Federal Budget,” Washington, D.C., 2001.

Section 4 Assessment

1. Discuss the difference between absolute and relative measures of poverty.
2. Which of the following is *not* one of the major categories of poor people in the United States?
 - a. children under age eighteen
 - b. able-bodied men who refuse to work
 - c. elderly people
 - d. people with disabilities
 - e. people who live alone or with nonrelatives
3. Do government welfare programs affect the poor’s decision to work? Explain.

Critical Thinking

4. **Understanding Cause and Effect** Describe the feminization of poverty. How does this trend affect the motivation to have children?

Tech Trends

Street-Smart Technology

During the last century, when mass production changed the way goods were produced, a favorite adage of businesspeople was "Time is money." In today's service economy (where most people are not producing a tangible product), information is money. Children from disadvantaged families have far less access (both at school and at home) to information technology, such as computers and the Internet, than children in wealthier families. This puts them at a disadvantage in competition for grades and in the job market.

Because of this situation, educators are designing special school-based programs to provide computers in low-income schools and to train teachers in those schools to use them. Harlem-based "Playing to Win" is one of these programs. This computer center offers classes and workshops to nearly four hundred people per week. It also provides assistance to other community groups that want to set up their own computer centers (George et al., 1993).

Another successful program is "Street-Level Youth Media" in Chicago's inner city. Street-Level's mission is to educate disadvantaged young people about new technologies. Street-Level began by asking inner-city youths to make videos about their everyday lives on the streets of Chicago. These videos helped residents to see the youths as real human beings trapped in desperate, life-threatening situations.

Street-Level continues to work with youths who have been rejected by mainstream society, helping them find solutions to their problems, strengthen their communities, and achieve economic success. With revenue earned from providing technical support to local businesses, Street-Level pays over \$70,000 in salaries to young people (Street-Level, 1999).

Analyzing the Trends

Do you think the rise of computer technology is affecting the social stratification structure in America? Do you think these computer-training programs can seriously affect the cultural values and subsequent economic behavior of those who participate in them? Why or why not?

Computer training is the gateway to success in the information-based economy. Students in these classrooms will have an advantage in the job market because of their computer-based skills.



Section 5

Social Mobility

Key Terms

- social mobility
- horizontal mobility
- vertical mobility
- intergenerational mobility
- caste (closed-class system)
- open class system

Types of Social Mobility

Mobility is the ability to move; **social mobility** is the movement of people between social classes.

What are the types of social mobility? Social mobility can be horizontal or vertical. **Horizontal mobility** involves changing from one occupation to another at the same social class level, as when an Army captain becomes a public school teacher, a minister becomes a psychologist, or a restaurant server becomes a taxi driver. Because horizontal mobility involves no real change in occupational status or social class, sociologists are not generally interested in investigating it. Vertical mobility, however, is another story.

With **vertical mobility**, a person's occupational status or social class moves upward or downward. When the change takes place over a generation, it is called **intergenerational mobility**. If a plumber's daughter becomes a physician, upward intergenerational mobility has occurred. If a lawyer's son becomes a carpenter, downward intergenerational mobility has occurred.

Section Preview

Social mobility, the movement of individuals or groups within the stratification structure, is usually measured by changes in occupational status. Sociologists are most interested in upward or downward (vertical) mobility. Closed-class systems permit little vertical mobility; open-class systems, such as those in industrialized countries, allow considerable vertical mobility.



Night school is a popular way for adults to improve skills needed for upward social mobility.

social mobility
the movement of individuals or groups between social classes

horizontal mobility
a change in occupation within the same social class

vertical mobility
a change upward or downward in occupational status or social class

intergenerational mobility
a change in status or class from one generation to the next

These Indian women learning about computers belong to one of the upper castes, as indicated by their clothes and body ornamentation.



Caste and Open-Class Systems

The extent of vertical mobility varies from society to society. Some societies have considerable mobility; others have little or none. This is the major difference between *caste* (or closed-class) system and *open-class systems*.

caste system
a stratification structure that does not allow for social mobility

What is a caste system? In a **caste system**, there is no social mobility because social status is inherited and cannot be changed. In a caste system, statuses (including occupations) are ascribed or assigned at birth. Individuals cannot change their statuses through any efforts of their own. By reason of religious, biological, superstitious, or legal justification, those in one caste are allowed to marry only within their own caste and must limit relationships of all types with those below and above them in the stratification structure. Apartheid, as practiced in South Africa before the election of Nelson Mandela, was a caste system based on race.

The caste system in India is one based on occupation and the Hindu religion. It is as complex as it is rigid. In it are four primary caste categories, ranked according to their degree of religious purity. The Brahmin, the top caste, is composed of priests and scholars. Next comes the Kshatriyas, including professional, governing, and military occupations. Merchants and businessmen form the third caste, called the Vaisyas. Finally, there is the Sudra caste, containing farmers, menial workers, and craftsmen. Actually, there is a fifth category called the “untouchables.” This group of Indians are thought to be so impure that any physical contact contaminates the religious purity of all other caste members. They are so low on the scale that they are not even considered to be part of the caste system. They are given the dirty, degrading tasks, such as collecting trash and handling dead bodies.

How is the caste system kept intact? Traditional rules exist in India to prevent movement into a higher caste. Members of different castes are not permitted to eat together, and higher-caste people will hardly accept anything to eat or drink from lower-caste persons. Untouchables, who must live



apart from everyone else, cannot even drink water from the wells used by higher castes. Although the long-standing legal prohibition against dating or marrying someone in a higher caste no longer exists, such crossings are still extremely rare. Most important, the caste system is maintained as a result of the power of the higher castes, who use their political clout, wealth, and prestige to prevent change.

What is an open-class system? In an **open-class system**, an individual's social class is based on merit and individual effort. Individuals move up and down the stratification structure as their abilities, education, and resources permit. Most people in the United States believe they live in an open-class system. In reality, the opportunity for upward mobility is sometimes denied individuals or groups in America today. For example, because of race or ethnicity, some members of minority groups, such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos, have been denied opportunities for social mobility. Therefore, because it imposes some limitations on upward mobility, U.S. society cannot be considered truly and completely open. It is, however, a relatively open-class system.

open-class system
a system in which social class is based on merit and individual effort; movement is allowed between classes

Upward and Downward Mobility

Few places in the world provide the opportunities for advancement that are available in the United States. Nevertheless, countless Americans fail to be upwardly mobile, despite their talents and dedication to work. This is hard for many people to accept because American tradition—both historical and fictional—is filled with examples of upward mobility. Earlier generations have been raised on the “rags to riches” Horatio Alger stories. In these books, a young, down-on-his-luck boy “makes good” through honesty, pluck, and diligence. The lesson to be learned is that the only thing standing between any American citizen and success is talent, a willingness to work, and perseverance. Teachers point to political leaders such as Abraham Lincoln and to early business leaders such as Cornelius Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, and Henry Ford to support the idea of unlimited mobility in American society. These men, in reality, are exceptions to the rule. While considerable upward mobility has occurred, great leaps in social-class level are rare (Gilbert, 1998). Upward mobility typically involves only a small improvement over the social class situation of one's parents.



Why is Microsoft founder Bill Gates the exception to the rule in terms of social mobility?

Is upward mobility increasing? After World War II, an explosion in the availability of high-paying manufacturing jobs made it relatively easy for people to move upward. Americans came to expect that their children would have more than they had, but this may not be the case for future generations. This change is the result of new technology and the globalization of business. With computer-driven production, improved means of communication, and better transportation, it is possible for U.S. companies seeking to lower their costs to move their manufacturing operations overseas. And they are doing so often. As a result, high-paying U.S. manufacturing jobs are being transferred to lower-paid foreign workers. U.S. workers, then, who lack the

The costs of downward mobility are already etched on this corporate executive's face.



Inequity of property will exist as long as liberty exists.

Alexander Hamilton
American statesman



education needed to perform the more technologically sophisticated jobs are being forced to take lower-paying jobs. Compared to their parents, more U.S. workers are experiencing downward mobility (Newman, 1999).

What are the social and psychological costs of downward mobility?

In *Falling from Grace*, sociologist Katherine Newman (1999) describes America's enduring belief in the rewards of hard work. This belief, she fears, prevents recognition of a major problem: downward mobility for many middle-class people. And, she argues, the consequences are enormous for people in a society that measures self-worth by occupational status. Downwardly mobile people experience lowered self-esteem, despair, depression, feelings of powerlessness, and a loss of a sense of honor.

Section 5 Assessment

1. What is social mobility?
2. Match the major types of social mobility with the examples. Use (IM) for intergenerational mobility, (VM) for vertical mobility, and (HM) for horizontal mobility.
 - a. a restaurant waiter becomes a taxi driver
 - b. an auto worker becomes a manager
 - c. the daughter of a hairdresser becomes a college professor
3. How do you think that the cultural values associated with a caste and an open-class system differently affect economic behavior?
4. Why is the United States not a completely open-class system?

Critical Thinking

5. **Analyzing Information** Analyze the social mobility that has occurred in your family for the last two generations (or more, if you prefer). Use sociological concepts in your analysis.

CHAPTER 8 ASSESSMENT

Summary

Section 1: Dimensions of Stratification

Main Idea: Stratification is the division of society into classes that have unequal amounts of wealth, power, and prestige. Karl Marx and Max Weber studied these dimensions of stratification in great detail.

Section 2: Explanations of Stratification

Main Idea: Each of the three perspectives—functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism—explains stratification in society in a different way.

Section 3: Social Classes in America

Main Idea: Sociologists have identified several social classes in the United States. They include the upper class, the middle class, the working class and the working poor, and the underclass.

Section 4: Poverty in America

Main Idea: Poverty can be measured in absolute or relative terms. The poor in the U.S. are disproportionately represented by African Americans, Latinos, women, and children.

Section 5: Social Mobility

Main Idea: Social mobility, the movement of individuals or groups within the stratification structure, is usually measured by changes in occupational status. Sociologists are most interested in upward or downward (vertical) mobility. Closed-class systems permit little vertical mobility; open-class systems, such as those in industrialized countries, allow considerable vertical mobility.



Self-Check Quiz

Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at soc.glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 8—Self-Check Quizzes** to prepare for the chapter test.

Reviewing Vocabulary

Complete each sentence using each term once.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| a. social stratification | i. wealth |
| b. feminization of poverty | j. horizontal mobility |
| c. social class | k. income |
| d. social mobility | l. open-class system |
| e. bourgeoisie | m. prestige |
| f. vertical mobility | n. absolute poverty |
| g. proletariat | o. relative poverty |
| h. intergenerational mobility | p. caste system |
1. A class system with no social mobility is called _____.
 2. _____ is movement among social classes based on merit and individual effort.
 3. _____ is upward or downward mobility based on occupational status.
 4. The changing from one occupation to another at the same general status level is known as _____.
 5. _____ is the movement of individuals or groups within social classes.
 6. The trend involving an increase in the number of women and children living in poverty is called _____.
 7. The recognition, respect, and admiration attached to social positions are known as _____.
 8. _____ is the amount of money received by an individual or group.
 9. The economic resources possessed by an individual or group is called _____.
 10. _____ is the name given to those who are ruled; the worker class.
 11. _____ is the name given to rulers; or those who own the means of production.
 12. The measure that compares the economic condition of those at the bottom of society with

CHAPTER 8 ASSESSMENT

the economic conditions of others is called _____.

13. The creation of layers, or strata, of people who possess unequal shares of scarce resources is called _____.
14. _____ is the absence of enough money to secure life's necessities.
15. A segment of the population whose members hold similar amounts of resources and share values, norms, and an identifiable lifestyle is called _____.
16. The mobility that occurs from one generation to the next is known as _____.

Reviewing the Facts

1. Examine the graph in Figure 8.7 on page 260 of your text. The graph illustrates that just over 46 percent of all poor people in the United States are white, while only 12% of the population is poor. What can you conclude from the graph about the representation of white people in terms of the total population of poor people?
2. According to Figure 8.8 on page 263, where does the federal government spend the largest share of the federal budget?
3. Describe false consciousness.
4. Explain how a sociologist determines relative poverty.
5. A man who has worked at a factory for twenty years loses his job because of layoffs. After several months, he ends up homeless. What type of social mobility is illustrated in this scenario?
6. Bill Gates has an estimated net worth of \$90 billion. How would sociologists label Gates in terms of social class?

Thinking Critically

1. **Analyzing Information** As implied in "Using Your Sociological Imagination" on page 241, attitudes about welfare spending are partially shaped by politicians and the media. Why do you think the media portray welfare spending

as such a serious problem when it represents such a small portion of federal spending? Why do Americans seem to complain less about the money spent on military or science projects?

2. **Applying Concepts** At least a hundred members of Congress are millionaires, which suggests that power and wealth do go hand in hand. Why is it unlikely that a poor person would become a member of Congress? Why do many poor people not participate in voting and political parties? What implications does this have for democratic government?
3. **Interpreting Graphs** In Figure 8.3, "Prestige Rankings of Selected Occupations in the United States," surgeons are rated as having the most prestigious job. In your view, what jobs on this list are essential? What jobs could society do without? Are there high-prestige jobs that are really not essential? What does this say about prestige rankings?

Create a diagram similar to the one below to record your answer.

JOBS—ESSENTIAL AND NOT ESSENTIAL TO SOCIETY

Essential	Prestige Rank	Not Essential	Prestige Rank
Surgeon	87	Disc Jockey	45

4. **Analyzing Information** Herbert Gans (1971), a noted sociologist, has written about the functions of poverty. He says that poverty serves many useful purposes in society. For example, the poor act as dishwashers, maids, and parking attendants. What are some other ways in which poverty might benefit society? What are some conflicts that poverty causes?
5. **Summarizing Information** Can you describe the cultural values underlying the federal government's philosophy in the War on Poverty in the 1960s?
6. **Making Inferences** The sinking of the luxury liner *Titanic* offers some insights into social class. Among first-class passengers, only 3 percent of the women died, and none of the children died. Among third-class passengers, 45 percent of the women died, and 70 percent of

the children died. In all, 76 percent of the third-class passengers died, compared with 40 percent of the first-class passengers. What implications would you draw from these numbers? Is it important to know that the third-class passengers were restricted to the lower decks and thus farther away from the lifeboats?

Sociology Projects

- 1. Understanding Disadvantaged Families** This activity may provide some insight into the difficulties faced by disadvantaged families every day. Work on the task with three or four of your classmates. Tear a sheet of paper into six pieces. On each piece, write one of the following: health care, education for my children, car maintenance, food, and housing. Now, imagine that because of an unexpected financial setback, you do not have enough money to take care of all these necessities and will need to eliminate one. Reach consensus to decide which category to eliminate.
- 2. Researching Employment** Using the employment section from your local newspaper, look for job ads in the following categories: jobs that require postgraduate degrees (highly skilled), jobs that require college or special training, and unskilled jobs. Which category has the most jobs available? What assumptions could you make about the job market based on analyzing these ads? What factors might influence how and where employers advertise certain kinds of jobs?
- 3. Perception and Reality** One of the themes of sociology is the difference between perception and reality. Write down five perceptions that you have heard people say about others based on their social class. Next to each, describe the reality based on information in this text or additional research. If not sure, write “unknown—needs further research.” For example, a common perception of wealthy people is that they consider themselves superior to other people (snobbery). The reality is that no one

has ever found a correlation between how much money you have and how nice you are.

- 4. Social Class** From magazines and newspapers, cut out as many pictures as you can find of different classes to make a montage. Label or circle traits that led you to determine that a person was in a particular class. (For example, the person may be driving a luxury car or working with hand tools.)

Technology Activity



- The National Center for Children in Poverty measures poverty rates for children in the United States. Visit its web site at <http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/>.
 - What is the Young Child Poverty Rate (YCPR) in the United States?
 - How does the YCPR in the United States compare to that of other industrialized Western nations?
 - Now click on “Child Poverty Facts” and select “Young Child Poverty in the States—Wide Variation and Significant Change.” Scroll down to the map of the United States. How does your state compare to the other states?
 - Now scroll further down the page to the table entitled “Change in the percentage and number of children under age six in poverty, by state, 1979–1983 to 1992–1996.” What is your state’s most recent YCPR? Has the percentage increased or decreased from the earlier YCPR?
 - Go back to the “Child Poverty Facts” page and select “Poverty and Brain Development in Early Childhood.” According to this page, when is the period for a child’s optimal brain development? What are some of the pathways through which a child in poverty is put at risk for poor brain development? How do you think poverty affects these pathways?

Chapter 8



Enrichment Reading

The Lives of Homeless Women

by *Elliot Liebow*

On the street or in a shelter, homelessness is hard living. . . . How do they manage to slog through day after day, with no end in sight? How, in a world of **unremitting** grimness, do they manage to laugh, love, enjoy friends, even dance and play the fool? How, in short, do they stay fully human while body and soul are under continuous and grievous assault?

Simple physical survival is within the grasp of almost everyone willing and able to reach out for it. As the women thrash about, awash in a sea of need, emergency shelters, along with public assistance in the form of cash, food stamps, and medical assistance, make it just possible for many of the women to keep their heads above water. Through the use of shelters, soup kitchens, and hospital emergency rooms, it is even possible for most homeless people who do not get public assistance to survive at some minimal level without benefit of a structured assistance program.

At their very best, however, these bare-boned elements of a life-support system merely make life possible, not necessarily tolerable or livable. Serious problems remain. Homelessness can transform what for others are little things into **insurmountable hurdles**. Indeed, homelessness in general puts a premium on “little things.” Just as some homeless women seem to have learned (more than most of us, perhaps) to value a small gesture of friendship, a nice day, a bus token, or a little courtesy that others might take for granted or not notice at all, so too can events or circumstances that would be trivial irritants to others approach **catastrophic proportions** for the homeless person.

For homeless women on the street, the struggle for **subsistence** begins at the animal level—for food, water, shelter, security, and safe sleep. In contrast, homeless women in shelters usually have these things; their struggle begins at the level of human rather than animal needs—protection of one’s property, health care, and avoidance of boredom. The struggle then moves rapidly to the search for companionship, modest measures of independence, dignity, and self-respect, and some hope and faith in the future. . . .

For some of the women, day-by-day hardships begin with the problem of getting enough sleep. A few women complained they could never get any sleep in a shelter. Grace was one of them. “There’s no getting sleep in a shelter,” she said. “Only rest. . . .”

There was indeed much night noise and movement. There was snoring, coughing, sneezing, wheezing, retching, . . . cries from bad dreams, occasional weeping or seizures, talking aloud to oneself or to someone else who may or may not have been present, and always movement to and from the bathroom. Grace was complaining about noise, and she found a partial remedy in ear plugs. But ear plugs could not help those women like Kathleen who were kept awake not by noise but by questions: Is this for me? How did I end up here? How will I get out? But eventually, as the night wore on, there was a lot of snoring, and that meant that, Grace and Kathleen notwithstanding, there was a lot of sleeping, too.

Having to get up at 5:30 A.M., and be out of the shelter by 7:00 was a major hardship of shelter life. It was not simply the fact of having to get up

and out, but rather that the women had to do this every day of the week, every day of the year (Thanksgiving and Christmas Day excepted), no matter what the weather or how they felt. On any given morning, as the women drifted onto the street, one might see two or three ailing women—this one with a fever or cough or a headache, that one with a limp or stomach ache or other ailment—pick up their bags and walk silently into the weather. . . .

Along with **perennial** fatigue, boredom was one of the great trials of homelessness. Killing time was not a major problem for everyone but it was high on most women's lists of hardships. Betty could have been speaking for most of them when she talked about the problem. On a social visit to the state psychiatric hospital where, four years earlier, she had been an inpatient in an alcoholic program, Betty sought out a nurse named Lou. They embraced and Lou asked Betty what she was doing these days. Betty said she was living in a shelter. Lou said that was a shame, and asked Betty how she spent her time.

"I walk the streets," said Betty. "Twelve hours and 15 minutes a day, every day, I walk the streets. Is that what I got sober for? To walk the streets?" Betty went on to say that she sits on a lot of park benches looking for someone to talk to. Many times there is no one, so she talks to the birds. She and the birds have done a lot of talking in her day, she said. . . .

Some of the women with jobs also had trouble killing time. Like the others, Grace had to leave the shelter by 7:00 A.M. but she couldn't report to work much before 9:00, and her job was less than a 10-minute drive away. "Have you ever tried to kill two hours in the morning, every morning, with nowhere to go and nothing to do?" she asked. "I have some tapes I can listen to in the car—some Christmas carols and some Bible readings. But two hours? Every day?"

. . . It is all too easy to think of homeless people as having few or no possessions . . . , but one of the major and most talked-about problems was storage—how to keep one's clothing, essential documents, and other belongings secure and **accessible**. . . . Stealing was believed to be common: "You've got to expect these things in shelters" was heard from staff and women alike. The

end result was that many homeless women who would have left their belongings behind had they had a safe place to store them were forced to take most of their belongings with them. Some wore them in layers. Others carried them. They had become, in short, bag ladies.

During a discussion of Luther Place, one of the best-run shelters in downtown Washington, one of the women said Luther Place was OK but she didn't like the women there—they were all bag ladies. One of the other women objected that the women at Luther Place were no different from women in other shelters. They were bag ladies, she said, because Luther Place had no storage space. . . .

Past and future . . . and even one's self were **embedded** in one's belongings. When Louise could no longer pay for storage and lost her belongings to auction, she was surprised at her own reaction to the loss. Her belongings had been so much a part of her, she said, that now that she's lost them, she's not sure who she is.

Source: Excerpted from Elliot Liebow, *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

Read and React

1. What are the two major problems related to homelessness discussed in this writing?
2. What attitude or belief about the homeless that you had before reading this article has been changed? If none, what did you learn that you didn't know before?

What Does it Mean?

accessible

available; easy to reach

catastrophic proportions

a size approaching disaster; too large to deal with individually

embedded

made a part of; surrounded by

insurmountable hurdles

obstacles or barriers that cannot be overcome

perennial

regularly repeated; enduring and persistent

subsistence

meeting basic needs

unremitting

constant; never ending