Classism (Social Classes)

By: Harrison Hong, Alex Cohen, Reuben Myburgh, Chethan Swanson
Functionalism in Classism

- Functionalism teaches that only qualified people who take over important positions are rewarded for their efforts (special talent and training).
- Recognizes the existence of inequality due to certain jobs being more "important" than others.
- In order to motivate people to aspire to these jobs and take the necessary sacrifices, society attaches money and prestige to these jobs.
Demo: Prestige Scores (Pre)

Instructions: Of the following occupations, where how would you rank them in terms of “prestige?” Prestige being defined by your society in terms of honor, admiration, respect...etc

1. Secret Service agent
2. Plumber
3. School Principal
4. Bill collector
5. Bank Teller
6. Jazz musician
7. Paramedic
8. Used Car Salesman
9. Landlord
10. Priest
Demo: Prestige Scores (Post)

1. Priest 71
2. Secret Service agent 70
3. School Principal 69
4. Paramedic 64
5. Jazz Musician 48
6. Plumber 45
7. Bank Teller 43
8. Landlord 41
9. Used Car Salesman 25
10. Bill collector 24

Discussion time...are any of these occupations too high or too low in your opinion? Which ones and why?
The prestige scores and order of each job is determined by U.S. cultural and meritocratic influences.

The status of any occupation is influenced by the pay and economic responsibility of each occupation.

The priest was highest on our particular list because of cultural influences, for example.

Some jobs are higher than others in prestige because they require skill and special training...the fundamental element of **functionalism** in classism.
Symbolic Interactionism in Classism

- Symbolic interactionism teaches us that a person’s social class is the result of talent and effort.
- Those “on top” have worked hard and used abilities to get where they are.
- Those “on bottom” lack the skills, talent, and motivation to succeed.
- Usually, people in lower social class have low self esteem and the people of high class are very confident in themselves.
- The system is not challenged and those on both sides of the social class spectrum have come to accept the existing system.
Video Clip: Fresh Prince of Bel Air (Pre)

- This clip is from The Fresh Prince of Bel Air
- This particular clip shows Will and Carlton trying to get into a fraternity, but Carlton is denied due to his social status
Video Clip: Fresh Prince of Bel Air (Post)

- Carlton is rejected because he is of high class
- The leader claims that he has had it easy all his life and he doesn’t deserve to call himself an African American because of this
- This relates to **symbolic interactionism** because:
  - The frat leader claims that Carlton has had it easy (this rejects S.I.)
  - Carlton’s father, Philip Banks, states he has “worked very hard to give his family a good life” which highlights the theory of S.I.
  - S.I. in classism = people become successful based off talent and effort as Philip has done for his family
Conflict Theory in Classism

- Conflict theory is based on Marx's ideas regarding class conflict.
- Idea that inequality exists due to some people being willing to exploit others.
- According to Marx, all of history has been a class struggle between the powerful and powerless.
- Those who own the means of production are able to spread their ideas, beliefs, and values throughout society.
- False consciousness - refers to working-class accepting capitalist ideas and values (accepting the division).
This clip is called “The Sneetches”

From Dr. Seuss

In the clip, the star bellied Sneetches are superior to the non-star bellied ones which represents/satirizes classism in society
The video represents the class struggle between the star bellied sneetches and the non star bellied sneetches.

Karl Marx in his conflict theory stated that class struggle has always existed and that the upper class has superiority.

The Sneetches, however, reject Karl Marx’s “false consciousness” theory because they DO NOT accept the division and rather attempt to fit in with the upper class.

Conflict theory states that political systems are skewed towards the more powerful which is consistent with the star bellied sneetches’ nobility and luxurious lives.
Dimensions of Stratification

- Social Stratification: The creation of layers (or strata) of people who possess unequal shares of scarce resources.
- Social Class: a segment of a population whose members hold similar amounts of scarce resources and share values, norms, and identifiable lifestyle.
  - Examples: Bourgeoisie, Proletariat
- Economic Dimension:
  - Income: amount of money received within a given time period by an individual
  - Wealth: refers to all the economic resources possessed by an individual or group
- Power Dimension:
  - Power: ability to control behavior of others
  - Expert knowledge can be used to expand power, ie: lawyer, politician, Albert Einstein
- Prestige Dimension:
  - Prestige: recognition, respect, and admiration attached to social positions
  - U can use two slides if u need @reuben
Social Classes in America

- Class consciousness: sense of identification with the goals and interests of the members of a particular social class

Upper Class: Investors, heirs, CEOs

Upper Middle: Upper Level Managers, professionals, owners of businesses

Middle Class: Lower Level Managers, semiprofessionals, non-retail salesmen

Working Class: Low paid manual, clerical, craft, retail sales workers

Working Poor: Lowest paid manual, retail, service workers

Underclass: unemployed, part time, public assistance
Poverty in America

- Absolute poverty - absence of enough money to secure life’s necessities
- Relative poverty - comparison of bottom portion of society to the rest
- 12.7% of American population is poor (37 million people)
- Most people in poverty come from identifiable groups
- African Americans and Latinos make up nearly half the poverty population
- When females head the family, chances of poverty rise greatly
- 18% of children under the age of 18 are in poverty (highest rate for any group in the US)
- Feminization of poverty - the idea or trend that females and children make up the majority of our nation’s poor
- Reasons as to why women tend to be in poverty more than men:
  - Women earn $.80 for every $1 men earn
  - Lack of good childcare facilities
  - Women with kids find it harder to maintain employment
Poverty in America (con.)

- 10% of elderly people are in poverty (age 65+)
- Also, disabled people are 3x more likely to be poor than able-bodied people
- “War on poverty” did not begin until 1964 after Great Depression (some programs however developed major criticism)
- Before 1996, welfare was lead by AFDC, but it is now replaced with TANF
- What the TANF does:
  - Limits how much welfare people receive
  - 3 elements: reduce welfare spending, increase state/local power, and oversee welfare eligibility
- Our nation’s progress? In 1996 - 12 million on welfare ... In 2003 - 5 million
- Most of those who left official poverty are not in the clear...but progress is being made
Social Mobility

Social Mobility is the movement of people between social classes.

Types of Mobility:

- **Vertical Mobility**
  - Change in social status
  - Two directions; Upward Mobility and Downward Mobility
  - Downward Intergenerational Mobility happens more frequently today (Newman, 1999)
  - Possibly due to outsourcing
  - Downwardly Mobile people tend to experience negative psychological effects

- **Horizontal Mobility**
  - Change in occupation without any change in social status

- **Intergenerational Mobility**
  - Mobility is Vertical or Horizontal over a generation
Social Mobility (cont.)

Social Systems:
- **Caste System**
  - Individuals are born unto a social class permanently
  - Social Mobility does not occur
  - Marriage is limited to individuals in the same caste
  - India is divided up to 5 classes; from priests and scholars to the “untouchables”
  - The power, wealth, and prestige of the upper classes keep the system intact
- **Open Class System**
  - Individual’s social class is based on merit and effort
  - Social Mobility is enabled
  - U.S. is relatively open class