

# Social stratification

**(as a risk factor for ill-health)**

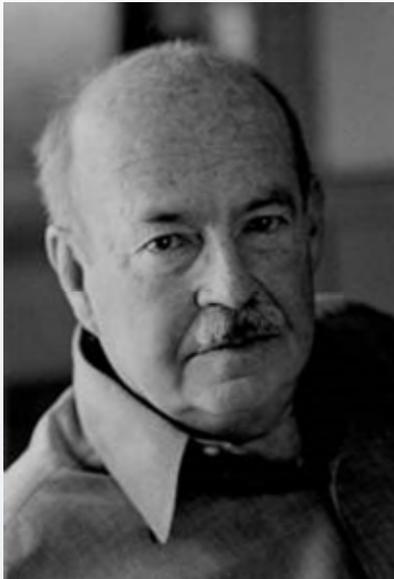
# SES

- What does this mean?
- What is the best way to measure it?

## American “Socio-economic status”

Based on dominant American school of sociology:  
Structural-Functionalism:

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) very influential father of US sociology from 1930s.



- Social inequality is “functional” for societies
- In order for a society to function, the “most able” people need to do the most responsible jobs.
- Find ‘most able’ people through the education system.
- Motivate them by conferring high status and income

## **“Natural” individual inequality is the reason for inequalities of income and status**

- Most worthy people get into highest paid, highest status jobs by proving their virtues in the education system
- These are needed to motivate people to perform important “functions” for society
- Educational achievement is the sign that they are more likely to be able to do this
- The “social gradient” is more or less a natural phenomenon.

## How to measure SES?

- Attempts to derive occupational status by combining estimated average income with average years of education for each occupation.
- Settled on using education and income as proxy measures for 'SES'.

# Education as a measure of social stratification

- *Educe* ‘bring out’ natural, innate powers.
- *Educe* is also ‘to lead or conduct in a particular direction’. Purpose of education to direct and enculturate, provide skills necessary develop capacities to control environment, fulfil social responsibilities, participate fully in society including in the job market.
- Assumed to measure varying cognitive (and non-cognitive) resources.
- Influenced by childhood resources and environment.

**From a life course perspective, exit from education is a potential ‘critical period’ or pivot point/transition which sets people onto trajectories that may influence health:**

- working conditions,
- income and material circumstances,
- family and social relationships,
- locus of control and health behaviours.

## **Advantages and disadvantages of using education as a measure of social stratification**

- Everyone in a modern society has some degree of education
- Applicable to women as well as men
- BUT: different age cohorts went through different systems, minimum leaving ages etc.
- Big international variations
- Education should be analysed separately from other aspects of social stratification.

## Material/Economic resources

- Most often income and wealth in industrial nations.
- Material from which house was built – housing conditions in relation to health
- But before industrial revolution land was the most important.
- In some societies, number of animals owned.



- Nancy Krieger (1997): Socioeconomic *Position* = social position & economic circumstances
- Mel Bartley: Social position = status/prestige & social class.
- Measures of inequality and social stratification in the UK have largely focused on social class.
- What is it?



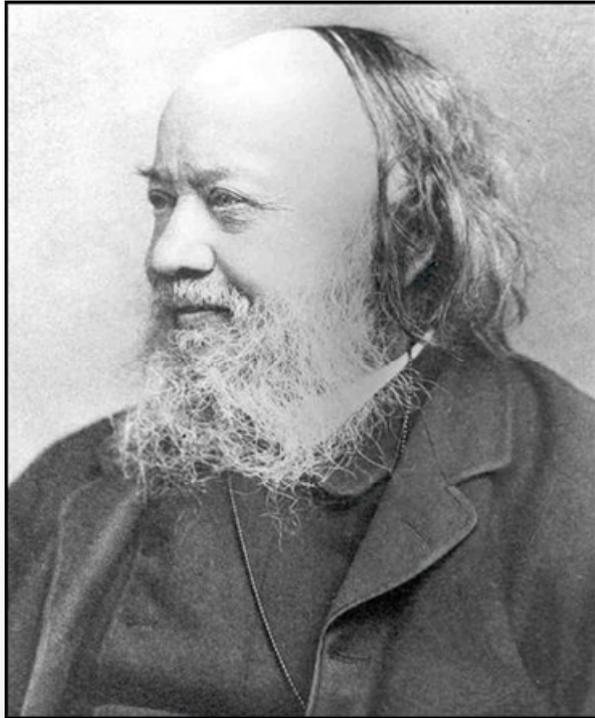
**Friedrich Engels 1820-1896**

**Karl Marx 1818-1883**

- Friedrich Engels, using the “Blue books” kept by public health authorities, documented severe health problems among urban workers.
- (1845) *Conditions of the Working Class in England*.

## **Social class according to Marx**

- Owners of land (who live on rent)
- Owners of capital (who live on profit)
- Owners of labour power (who live on wages)
- Landowners need tenants to pay rent
- Capital owners need workers to produce things they can sell at a profit
- Workers (owners of labour power) need owners of capital to employ them



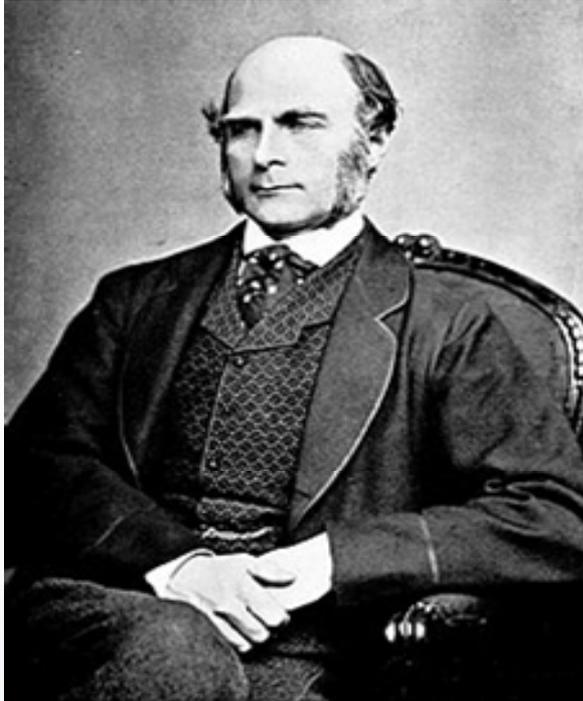
Edwin Chadwick 1800-1890

***(1842) *The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain.****

**1948 Public Health Act**

# Environmentalism

- Work of Snow, Chadwick etc. led to Sanitary Movement
- Towns & cities got cleaner
- Infectious disease mortality fell, infant survival rose
- But urban poor still had poor health & high mortality



Francis Galton 1822-1911

**Statistician & founder of Eugenics movement**

## Eugenic explanation for poor health of urban working class

- Sanitary reform had a paradoxical result (they said)
- More “unfit” infants survived
- These then reproduced themselves
- Result: a growing number of “genetically unfit” adults among the urban poor
- So health did not improve
- Eugenics’ social hierarchy was based on intelligence rather than ownership

# Social structure according to Galton and the Eugenics Movement

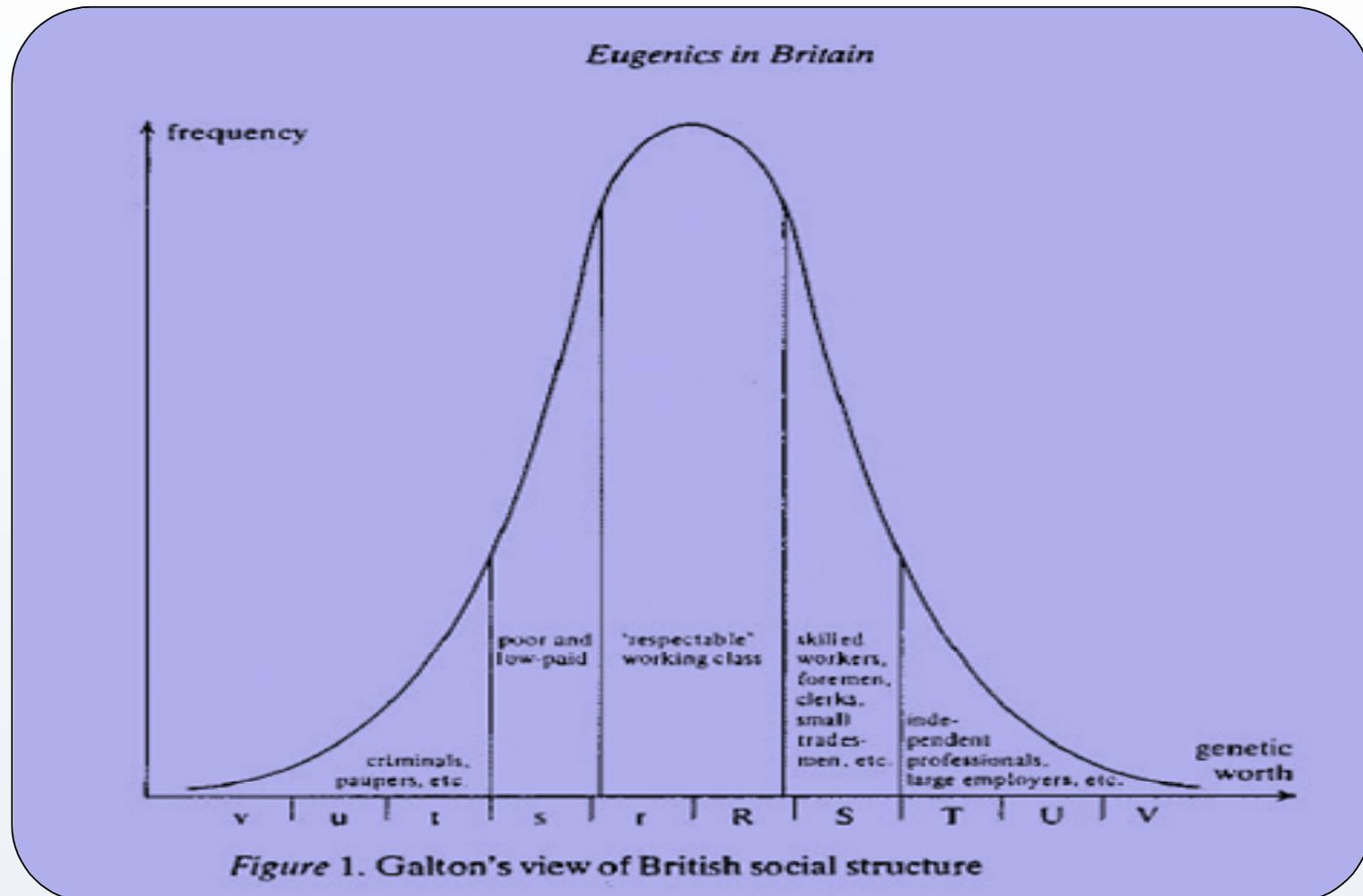


Figure 1. Galton's view of British social structure

# Britain first official measure of social class, 1913

T.H.C. Stevenson 1870 - 1932

Environmentalists developed a measure of social class to study class differences in fertility and mortality in effort to debunk Eugenecists' argument that the population's "genetic worth" was declining because "lower worth" children were saved by new public health measures

# Stephenson's Social Classes

I 'Upper & middle'

II

III Skilled worksmen

IV

V Unskilled worksmen

# Registrar-General's Social Class

I Professionals

II Managers

IIIN Non manual

IIIM Skilled manual

IV Semi skilled manual

V Unskilled manual

} Only a single class till 1981

## **Developing a more scientific measure of social class: National Statistics Socio-Economic Classes (NS-SEC)**

- 1990s recognised need for a clearer measure of social position for use in UK Official Statistics
- NS-SEC is based on employment relations and conditions
- Which jobs have more security, better career prospects, more power and autonomy? (based on Weber's concept of "Life Chances")
- Occupations with better conditions in these respects will tend to increase the general "life chances" of incumbents.

## **NS-SEC: Criteria**

- **Paid salary or hourly**
- **Wage increments?**
- **Job security**
- **Chances of promotion**
- **Decide when to start and leave work**
- **Influence over planning of own work**
- **Influence over planning other people's work**

## National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC)

- 1 Higher managerial and professional occupations, including employers in large firms, higher managers, professionals whether they are employees or self-employed
- 2 Lower managerial and professional occupations and higher technical occupations
- 3 Intermediate occupations (clerical, administrative, sales workers with no involvement in general planning or supervision but high levels of job security, some career prospects and some autonomy over their own work schedule)
- 4 Small employers and self-employed workers
- 5 Lower technical occupations (with little responsibility for planning own work), lower supervisory occupations (with supervisory responsibility but no overall planning role and less autonomy over own work schedule)
- 6 Semi-routine occupations (moderate levels of job security; little career prospects; no pay increments; some degree of autonomy over their own work)
- 7 Routine occupations (low job security; no career prospects; closely supervised routine work)

NS-SEC	E-SEC
1. Higher managers & professionals	1. Higher managers & professionals, large employers e.g. lawyers, scientists, higher education teaching professionals, professional engineers. Company directors and chief executives Higher level government officials
2. Lower managers & professionals	2. Lower managers & professionals e.g. teachers, nurses, medical ancillaries, aircraft pilots, journalists; production and operations managers, managers in small (<10) firms; computing technicians, civil engineering technicians.
3. Intermediate	3. Intermediate Most clerical occupations and administrative assistants, e.g. government social benefits officials, office clerks.
4. Employers in small firms; self employed	4. Small employers, not agriculture
	5. Small employers in agriculture
5 Lower supervisory & technical	6. Lower supervisors & technicians e.g. draughtspersons, telephone line installers, precision instrument makers, electronics fitters.
6. Semi routine	7. Lower services, sales & clerical shop workers, care workers.
	8 Lower technical occupations tool-makers, fitters, plumbers, locomotive drivers.
7. Routine	9. Routine occupations e.g. cleaners, labourers, drivers of motor vehicles, machine operators, porters and messengers.

# WHO IS YOUR HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD?

- Measurement of women's social class complicated by weaker ties to labour market. Does individual occupation truly reflect class position.
- Surveys collected occupational class of head of household.
- 1997 Nancy Krieger argued for taking the 'dominance' approach.

## **Social position = social class & social status**

### **We can more easily talk about high and low in relation to STATUS**

Standing and respect with the community.

Current measure of social class based on employment relations and conditions, but status can be acquired through variety of ascribed or acquired attributes, including occupational class, as well as wealth, education, gender, age, behaviour, personality characteristics, whatever a particular society or community values.

“Coverage of Catherine Middleton's family, wealth, upbringing and ancestors.. [has] exposed Britons' obsessions with policing class boundaries. The undertone of much of it has not been celebratory, but incredulous and indignant. Newspapers have dwelt endlessly on the fact that her family tree includes **coal miners, domestic servants, road sweepers and butchers**. Her origins are described as humble and her mother, in a single disdainful adjective, as pushy. There is far less criticism of her father...He comes from a **background described as "solid"; lines of provincial solicitors and landed gentry...** We read... that the Queen disapproves of Mrs Middleton, a **former air hostess**, while having a "soft spot" for her husband, **a former pilot.**”

*Evening Standard* 11 April 2011

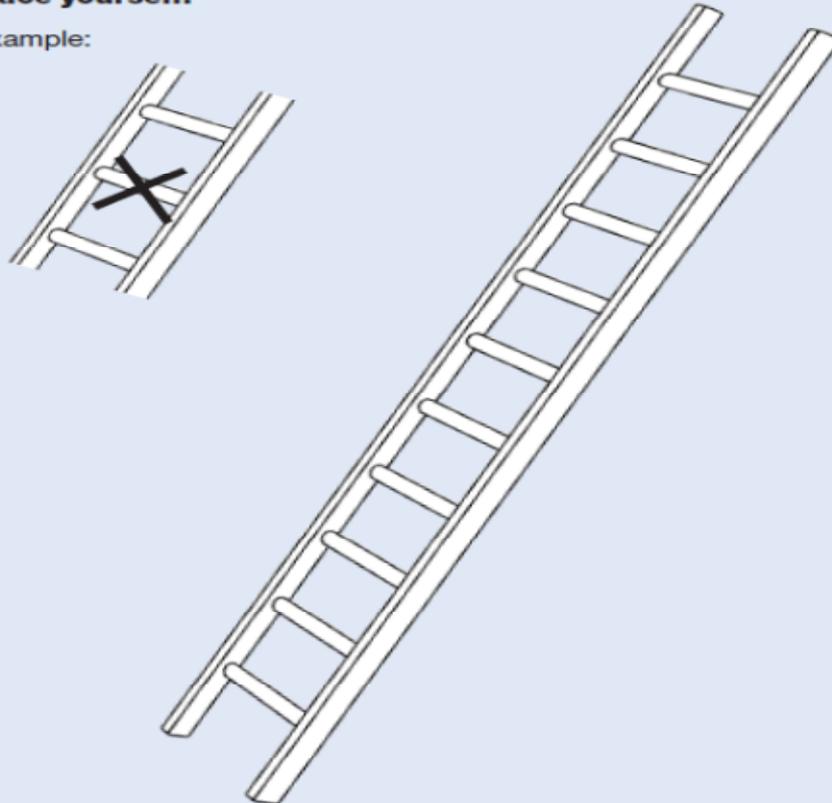
# Subjective social status

**29**

Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in our society. At the top of the ladder are the people who are the best off – those who have the most money, most education and best jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off – who have the least money, least education, and the worst jobs or no jobs. The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to the people at the very top and the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom.

Please mark a cross on the rung on the ladder where you would place yourself.

Example:





## Max Weber 1864 -1920

- Social class – life chances based on acquisition within the market place.
- Social status: “every component of life fate that is determined by a positive or negative social estimation of honour”. Characterised by consumption, lifestyle and habits of taste.  
(from *Economy and Society* 1922)

# Weber's four characteristics of status groups

1. Evaluate social worth and bestow honour
2. Segregate themselves from other status groups
3. Uphold patterns of consumption and canons of taste
4. Monopolise status privileges

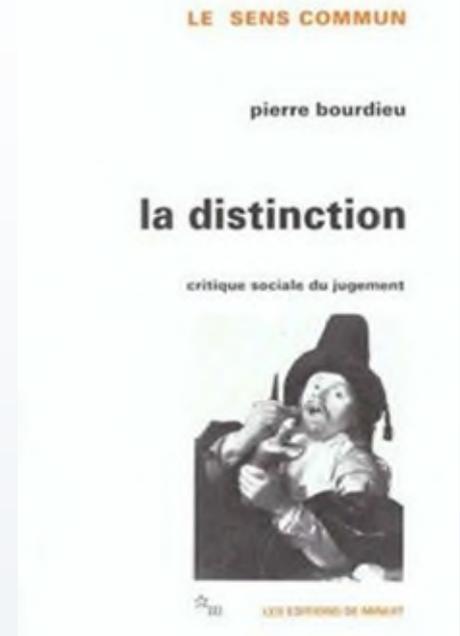
These characteristics are often performed through socialising and sharing meals together, worshiping side by side, offspring marriages within the group.

## British prestige measures

- Based on surveys of which occupations people's friends or marriage partners belong to.
- Cambridge scale “general social advantage”
- Based on: “actual, individual behaviour in the form of choice of people with whom to interact socially”

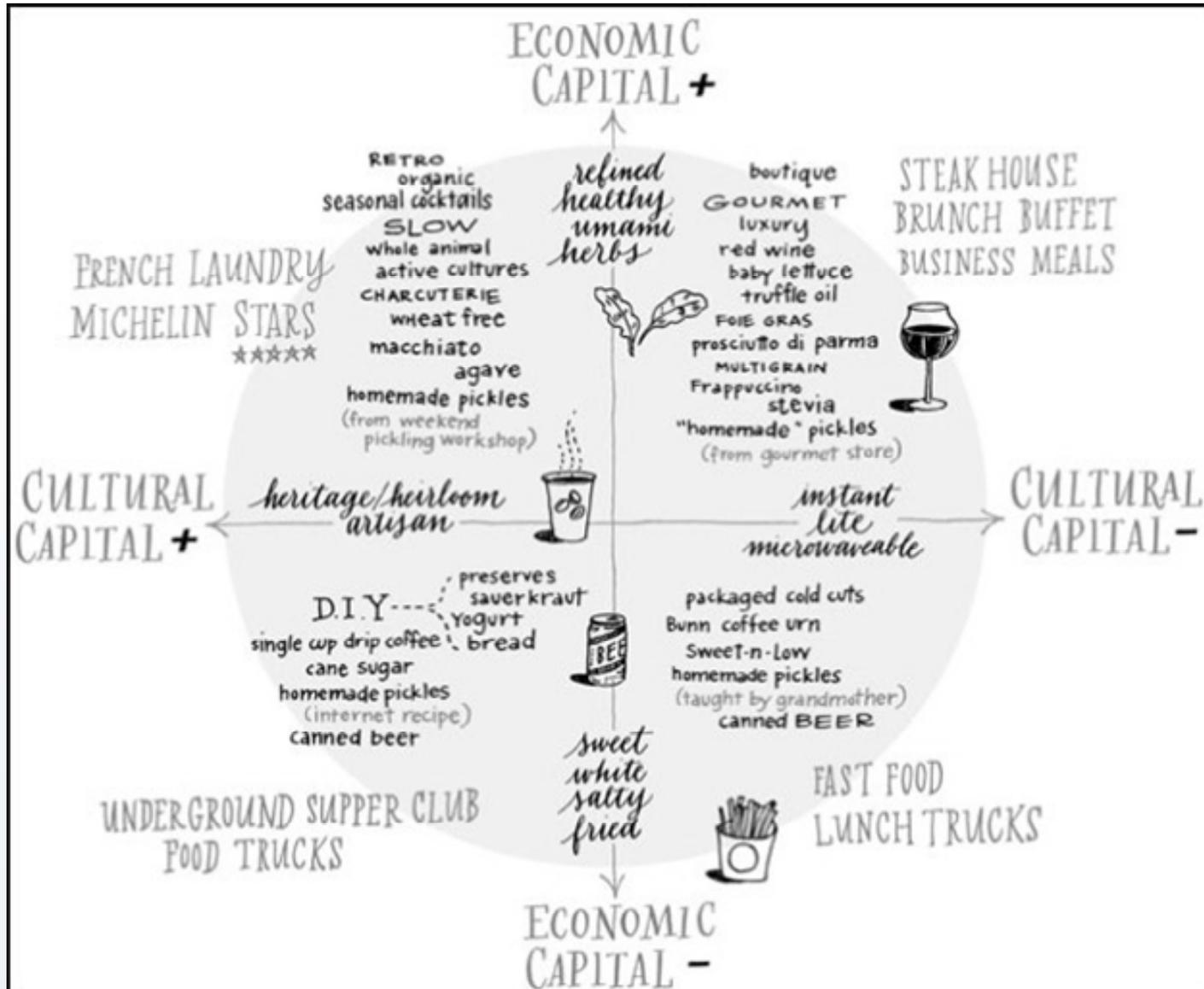


## Pierre Bourdieu 1930-2002



*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979, 1984 in English)

Cultural capital as non-economic assets promoting social mobility. Consumption of cultural capital reinforces distinction and social distance between status groups.





## Mike Savage

- Focus on cultural dimensions of inequality.
- Social Class in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (2015)
- BBC Great British Class Survey

Graphic from The Independent, 4 April 2013

Data based on Savage, M., et al. (2013) A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment, *Sociology*, doi: 10.1177/0038038513481128.



From 1970s Post modernists: Influence of social class and other 'grand narratives' that structure people's lives (such as religion, patriarchy, nationalism) are in decline. Individual identities constructed through consumerism.



Anthony Giddens

Theory of Structuration (1973) combined agency and social structure equally.

Developed 'Third Way' centrist policy adopted by Tony Blair.

Tony Blair 1999 'The class war is over.'

## Take home

Importance of considering the range of social and economic dimensions of inequality carefully in any research that you do.

What role do social status, social bias, discrimination across identities, employment relations and conditions (and social participation), material circumstances (income, wealth and physical environment) play? How will you take account of them?



