Social stratification

theory, measurement & inequality
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:

• 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 (based on ability) is the reason for inequalities of income and status.

• Education and income tend to be used as proxy measures for ‘SES’.
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 & biology:

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

- Education should be analysed separately from other aspects of social stratification.
- Income captures material/economic pathways, sometimes measured as wealth in older age groups.
- Nancy Krieger (1997): Socioeconomic Position in recognition of the need to treat indicators as conceptually distinct = social position (education) & economic circumstances (income).

- Mel Bartley: Social position = social class & status/prestige.

- Measures of inequality and social stratification in the UK have largely focused on social class.

- What is it & how is it different from social status?
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
Environmentalism Vs. Eugenicists

Environmentalists

- Public health (John Snow) & engineers (Edwin Chadwick) etc concerned about urban poverty & infectious disease mortality. Led to Sanitary Movement
- Towns & cities got cleaner. Infectious disease mortality fell, infant survival rose
- But urban poor still had poor health & high mortality

Eugenicists

- Francis Galton applied statistics to inheritance of intelligence.
- Said sanitary reform had a paradoxical result -- more “unfit” infants survived to reproduce and grow the number of “genetically unfit” adults among the urban poor.
- 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. THC. Stephenson’s Social Classes

I ‘Upper & middle’

II

III Skilled workmen

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)
Social position = social class & social status

Max Weber:

• Social class – life chances based on acquisition within the market place (underpins SEC measure).

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

Pierre Bourdieu:

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

There are other, potentially intersecting, dimensions of inequality, eg. ethnicity, gender.

These inequalities partly driven by unequal access to educational and economic resources, but also status/discrimination.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Managerial/Admin/Prof</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Semi-routine/routine</th>
<th>Never worked/unemployed</th>
<th>Full-time students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INDIAN</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>BLACK CARIBBEAN</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIXED</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>20.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>BLACK AFRICAN</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>21.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAKISTANI</td>
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<tr>
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<td>22.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Women’s confinement to the home and exclusion from employment

Gender difference in # of years spent in employment

Decade of birth

*Models adjusted for year of birth and quadratic age term within decades.

Source: McMunn et al. 2014
Gender inequality in labour market outcomes remain

Figure 1: The employment rate for all people increased by 0.6 percentage points on the year to a record high of 76.5%

UK employment rates (aged 16 to 64 years), seasonally adjusted, between January to March 1971 and October to December 2019

- 74% of part-time employees are women (ONS Labour Force Survey 2019)

- Women earn 43% less than men; full-time gender pay gap is 8.9% (ONS Labour Force Survey 2019).

- 69% of low paid* earners are women (Women’s Budget Group, 2020)

- 34% of MPs are women (Fawcett Society, 2020)

- 29% of FTSE 100 directors are women (Fawcett Society, 2020)

- And over-representation in precarious and low paid sectors (Women’s Budget Group, 2020)

*Below two-thirds of hourly median income.
% who agree: “It’s a man’s job to earn money; a woman’s job to look after the home and family”

Down to 9% in 2017

% who agree: “a mother should stay at home when there is a child under school age”

Remained at 33% in 2017
Parenthood continues to reset gender relations within households

Source: Schober 2009
“Unpaid care work is the missing link in explaining gender gaps in labour market outcomes” (OECD 2014)

Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes

OECD Development Centre, December 2014

By Gaëlle Ferrant, Luca Maria Pesando and Keiko Nowacka

April 2020: Women’s Budget Group Commission for a Gender-Equal Economy recognised unpaid care work as being at the heart of gender inequalities.
Health inequalities – an intractable problem
Biology as a potential mechanism for linking social conditions with health.

Social conditions (egs.)
- Income
- Education
- Occupation / social class
- Labour market participation
- Status/prestige
- Ethnic identity
- Gender identity
- Social & family relationships

Material (egs.)
- Damp housing
- Polluted neighbourhood
- Lack of green space or walkability

Psychological (egs.)
- Sense of control
- Social support
- Discrimination
- Hostility

Behavioral (egs.)
- Substance use, inc smoking & alcohol
- Low physical activity / high sedentary time
- Poor sleep

Biological systems (egs)
- Neuroendocrine
- Immune
- Metabolic
- Cardio/resp

Health / mortality / functioning

Age / time
Embodiment: A growing area of research

Neuro-endocrine, immune & metabolic systems:

➢ interrelated,
➢ influenced by stress
➢ linked with chronic illness.

**Metabolic risk**

- Waist circumference
- Systolic & diastolic blood pressure
- HDL cholesterol
- Triglycerides
- Glycated haemoglobin

**Inflammation**

- C-Reactive Protein
- Fibrinogen

**Neuroendocrine**

- Cortisol
Income & education inequalities in inflammation in UKHLS

Source: Davillas, Benzeval & Kumari 2017 Nature
Inflammatory markers, social and psychological processes; lifecourse perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C-reactive protein (mg/liter)</th>
<th>Social class at birth</th>
<th>Social class at 23 years</th>
<th>Social class at 42</th>
<th>Social class at birth</th>
<th>Social class at 23 years</th>
<th>Social class at 42 years</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social class 1</td>
<td>0.89 (2.77)</td>
<td>0.91 (2.68)</td>
<td>0.99 (2.68)</td>
<td>0.95 (2.85)</td>
<td>1.06 (3.18)</td>
<td>1.11 (3.15)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social class 2</td>
<td>0.96 (2.53)</td>
<td>1.00 (2.69)</td>
<td>1.11 (2.72)</td>
<td>1.09 (3.09)</td>
<td>1.14 (2.97)</td>
<td>1.15 (2.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social class 3</td>
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<td>1.15 (2.64)</td>
<td>1.14 (2.60)</td>
<td>1.26 (3.12)</td>
<td>1.52 (3.06)</td>
<td>1.36 (2.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social class 4</td>
<td>1.16 (2.65)</td>
<td>1.23 (2.61)</td>
<td>1.17 (2.94)</td>
<td>1.26 (2.94)</td>
<td>1.35 (3.00)</td>
<td>1.33 (3.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p for trend</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Social class 1, professional and managerial; social class 2, nonmanual; social class 3, manual; social class 4, unskilled.

Geometric mean values are presented.
Numbers in parentheses, standard deviation.

Source: Tabassum, Kumari et al. 2008 AJE
Rate of death involving the coronavirus (COVID-19) by ethnic group and sex relative to the White population, England, 2 March to 28 July 2020

Source: Office for National Statistics
Risk of preterm delivery for Black vs. White women in the CARDIA study

Unadjusted
Adjusted for racism
Adjusted for SES
Adjusted for racism & SES

Mustillo et al, Am J Public Health, 2004
The Gender & Health Paradox
“Women are sicker but men die quicker.”

Difference in male and female life expectancy at birth, England, 1841 to 2010-12

Source: Decennial Life Tables, ONS
1958 COHORT: Association between work-family life courses (16-42yrs) & INFLAMMATION (fibrinogen 44yrs). (N = 6,481)

- Fully adjusted' models include gender, childhood social class, childhood health and behavioural difficulties, educational attainment, occupational class of head of household, smoking, physical activity, problem drinking, BMI.

Source: Lacey et al. IJE 2015

‘Fully adjusted’ models include gender, childhood social class, childhood health and behavioural difficulties, educational attainment, occupational class of head of household, smoking, physical activity, problem drinking, BMI.
1958 COHORT: Association between work-family life courses (16-42 yrs) & METABOLIC MARKER – HDL cholesterol age 44 yrs. (N = 6,597)

‘Fully adjusted’ models include gender, childhood social class, childhood health & behavioural difficulties, educational attainment, occupational class of head of household, smoking, physical activity, problem drinking.

Source: McMunn et al. JECH 2015
Intersectional inequality

Hierarchies of power across different dimensions intersect for people in multiplicative ways.

Source: Holman, Salway & Bell Nature 2020
Figure 3. Intersectional disparities in blood biomarkers.

X axis = effect size. Reference level = sample mean.

Source: Holman, Salway & Bell Nature 2020
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?