

Social and economic hierarchies

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- Inequality
 - We live in an unequal society, stratified by wealth
 - a few people get a lot of the total income, a lot of people split up the remainder
 - Graph of US wealth distribution in 2005:
 - The richest 20% of the population owns about 85% of all the wealth in the country
 - The next-richest 20% owns about 10% of all the wealth
 - Leaving less than 5% of the wealth of the country to be divided among the remaining 60% of the population
 - The poorest 40% (not far from half of the population!) owns so little of the national wealth that it is not even visible on the graph.
 - Some estimates as of 2009 suggest that the richest 1% of Americans hold almost 50% of all American wealth
 - Source: Norton and Ariely, “Building a Better America – One Quintile at a Time”
<http://www.people.hbs.edu/mnorton/norton%20ariely%20in%20press.pdf>
 - This is from the Harvard Business School, not known for loopy liberal claims
 - Or consider pay: in 2005, US CEOs in major corporations earned 262 times the average pay of US full-time workers
 - That is, a major CEO earns as much in ONE DAY as the average American employee earns in one YEAR
 - $(2080 \text{ working hours in a year} / 262 = 7.9 \text{ hours} = 1 \text{ working day})$
 - Source: Economic Policy Institute, a progressive but legitimate research organization,
http://www.epi.org/economic_snapshots/entry/webfeatures_snapshots_20060621/
 - in 2005, US CEOs in major corporations earned 821 times the minimum wage
 - A person earning minimum wage has to work a full year to earn as much as an average major CEO earns in 152 minutes. (about 2.5 hours)
 - Source: Economic Policy Institute, a progressive but legitimate research organization,
http://www.epi.org/economic_snapshots/entry/webfeatures_snapshots_20060627/
 - This is extreme inequality. The rich in our society are very, very much richer than the poor, or even than the average
- compare our stratification to that of Egypt under Khufu (Cheops), the pharaoh who built the Great Pyramid at Giza
 - Khufu’s Great Pyramid at Giza
 - 230 m square (756 feet)
 - if built on this campus, it would cover Stevenson, Darwin, Salazar hall, the Student Union, the Commons, and most of the main quad
 - 146 meters tall (475 feet)
 - 2.3 million cut sandstone interior blocks, 2.5 tons each
 - estimated 84,000 laborers working 80 days/year for 20 years (~ 370,000 person-years!)
 - outside cased in limestone blocks, 16 tons each
 - cost in modern terms:

- the low-skilled labor alone at California minimum wage (\$8.00/hr since 2008) would total 8.6 billion dollars
- enough sandstone for the interior blocks would cost almost 0.6 billion dollars (5.75 million tons at \$100/ton)
- plus all the skilled labor, limestone, granite, etc. which today would be very expensive
- not to mention all the gold and expensive goods placed in it
- all told, equivalent to perhaps ten billion dollars
- Khufu could build this pyramid because he basically had at his disposal the entire territory, population, and civilization of Egypt, the greatest single country on Earth at the time
- yet in 2009, there were 35 people in the world rich enough to build and furnish at least one Great Pyramid (*Forbes*, *The World's Billionaires* 2009)!
- in 2011, there are 81 people in the world rich enough to do that (*Forbes*, *The World's Billionaires* 2011)!
- the number of 10-billionaires has more than doubled in the LAST TWO YEARS alone!
- Bill Gates, the second-richest man in the world, worth \$56 billion this month (*Forbes*, March 2011), could build and furnish about five great pyramids
- Carlos Slim, the richest man in the world (from Mexico) could build seven
- Gates or Slim could buy out the greatest pharaoh of Old Kingdom Egypt and still have most of his fortune left over!
- today's society is far *more* stratified than the extraordinarily stratified society of Old Kingdom Egypt... amazing!
- This must have a huge effect on all sorts of social, economic, political, and other aspects of society
- if we are going to understand how people live and relate to each other our own society, or any other, we clearly need to
 - recognize this inequality
 - and understand how it works
- **Hierarchy**: a system of ranking
- a hierarchy may be based on any criteria for ranking people
 - wealth, as we just discussed
 - descent (or birth)
 - someone born into an aristocratic family, a commoner family, or a slave family
 - a direct descendent of a revered ancestor (George Washington, the Prophet Mohammed, etc.) vs. more distant relatives by marriage, vs. unrelated people
 - ethnicity or social race
 - education, age, gender, occupation
 - position in a hierarchical organization, like a corporation or the Catholic church
- people who fall into the same category in such a ranking are a “**class**”
 - royalty, nobility, serfs, working class, managerial class, educated class, “the poor”, “disadvantaged minority”, etc.
 - people often use “class” to mean “**socioeconomic class**”

- categories of people based on a combination of wealth, education, birth, overall prestige in society
- members of a class typically (but not always)
 - have had similar experiences
 - may have come to see things in similar ways
 - may have similar needs, values, desires, etc.
- they may or may not think of themselves as a group or class
 - may or may not have “class consciousness”: more on this later
- hierarchies can vary in other ways
 - how many levels the hierarchy has
 - The American construction of socioeconomic classes
 - We recognize just a few levels
 - such as lower, middle, upper class
 - although all know that there really are finer divisions
 - India: **caste** system with 100s of levels, lumped into a few larger categories
 - Brahmins: priests
 - Kshatriya castes: soldiers, politicians, administrators
 - Vaisya castes: farmers and merchants
 - Sudra castes: service to other castes; include untouchables in polluting professions
 - the caste system is based on birth: you are born into a caste and stay there
 - what privileges are associated with the different levels
 - Indian caste system example, continued:
 - caste specifies your occupation will be
 - your social status – who is above you, and who is below you
 - who you can marry
 - hierarchies may determine many other things
 - whether you can vote or hold office, or which offices
 - whether you can own land
 - where you can live or work
 - where or whether you can go to school, etc.
 - how much inequality there is (how great the difference is between the privileges of the bottom level and of the top level)
 - how “tall” or extreme the hierarchy is
 - modest wealth hierarchy: richest in the hierarchy average twice as rich as the poorest
 - extreme wealth hierarchy: richest in the hierarchy average 100 times as rich as the poorest
 - how hard or easy it is to change from one level to another
 - also called **permeability** or **mobility**
 - in the Indian caste system, you could not move between castes; they were fixed by birth
 - in US, we have
 - class hierarchy: one can move between income levels and classes, but most do not

- in US, class is still strongly by birth: parents' income is the best predictor of children's eventual income
 - hierarchy of ethnicities: harder to move between ethnicities, but possible by education, "passing", marriage, etc.
 - hierarchy of social races: hard to move between social races, although a few manage to
- Foragers live in rough equality
 - observed both ethnographically and historically
 - a functional explanation for egalitarian organization among foragers:
 - among foragers, reciprocity is needed to even out subsistence risk
 - especially with highly variable food sources like hunted meat
 - this seems to work best with generalized reciprocity
 - so children, the old, etc. are not expected to pay back an equivalent amount, as they would with balanced reciprocity
 - generalized reciprocity, in turn seems to work best with, or even require, **egalitarian** social organization
 - minimal inequality, minimal hierarchy
- Most other kinds of societies do not live in equality. Why not?
- Hierarchy has NOT been typical for humans
 - humans have been foragers for 98% of our existence (or more, depending on how you count)
- so how did this aberration of hierarchical society come to be?
 - this is a question for archaeologists
 - the answer is not clear
 - but the rise of significant inequality apparently happened among large, settled groups
 - and with few possible exceptions, these generally appear to have been possible only with farming to support them
- how is social inequality or hierarchy socially constructed?
 - that is, how is it maintained and instilled in each new member born into the society?
 - how is inequality and hierarchy **naturalized**: made to seem natural, normal, necessary, inevitable
 - this is an ongoing research interest in anthropology
 - we will look at this process more in the next two classes
- but *all* social organization is constructed... so, how is social *equality* constructed?
 - one way, in one culture: "insulting the meat"
 - Lee: *Eating Christmas in the Kalahari* (assigned reading for a later class)
- Is hierarchy inevitable?
- Is it necessary?
- Constructing hierarchy
 - Constructing inequality through ideology
 - **ideology**: a set of beliefs and values
 - typically, that are a worldview, or that explain a worldview
 - often (not always) characteristic of a culture:

- shared ideas about how the world works
- and shared values about what is good, bad, appropriate, etc.
- Most or all societies have an ideology that naturalizes their social organization
 - makes it seem normal, reasonable, necessary, natural
- ideologies are usually emic
 - they are ideas that the people in a society have about their own society
 - how they see their own cultural world
- Some societies have ideology of equality
 - such as the Ju/'hoansi
- most societies today have ideologies of inequality
 - that is, they have an ideology that naturalizes inequality
 - makes differences in status, prestige, wealth, power, etc. seem normal, right, natural, inevitable
 - that allow people to construct and think about ranked categories in ways that are consistent with the rest of their culture's values
- such as our ideology of socioeconomic class here in the US (**ideology of class** is a term from Marx, more on this later)
 - we assume that socioeconomic class differences are natural, inevitable, and acceptable
 - US ideology of class is based on the idea that there is equal opportunity and a “level playing field”
 - so any differences in success are due to people's own effort and ability
 - in order for this ideology to be believable, there must be some ability or quality that justifies why some people are upper class
 - some are born or raised to be better equipped to succeed
 - more intelligent, harder working, more willing to take risks, etc.
 - in other ideologies, there would be other justifications or explanations for inequality
 - some families are favored by God
 - some families might even have the “divine right of Kings”
 - fate
 - your class in this life is determined by your behavior in previous lives, etc.
- this ideology of class is functional
 - it serves psychological needs
 - without it, we would have to think that poverty is unfair
 - the lower class might feel wronged; the upper class might feel guilty
 - this is an example of Malinowski's functionalism, based on the doctrine of needs
 - it serves social stability
 - otherwise, the lower class might try to change something
 - at the upper class's expense
 - think strikes, work slowdowns, vandalism, arson, riots...
 - this is an example of Radcliffe-Brown's structural functionalism
- Other hierarchies are naturalized by other ideologies
 - hierarchies of gender
 - based on constructions of masculinity and femininity

- hierarchies of race
 - based on constructions of racial categories and their supposedly different characteristics, abilities, and faults
- hierarchies of ethnicity, and others
- we will look at some of these in later classes
- Two broad views of hierarchy: integrative theory and exploitative theory
- **integrative** theories of hierarchy (or social stratification, or inequality)
 - hierarchy is needed to coordinate more complex activities
 - which are necessary as population grows and production is intensified
 - irrigation systems
 - storage facilities to tide over crop losses, and to compensate people for activities on behalf of the group, like construction projects
 - defensive walls
 - effective military
 - conflict resolution
 - police to enforce peace, property, civility
 - and many other new functions
 - the more complex the division of labor gets (the more different roles and specialties)...
 - the more interactions there are
 - and the more coordination (functional integration) is needed for successful outcomes
 - example seeing the Indian caste system as integrative
 - everyone knows their place and role, and does it willingly
 - landowners have willing workers
 - laborers are assured of work
 - all necessary tasks get done without obvious coercion
 - society produces and reproduces itself, remains stable
 - much the same could be said for hierarchies of wealth, power, status
 - they are ultimately for the good of all of society
 - very rich CEOs are normal and necessary because they are needed to create jobs and products we want
- **exploitative** theories of hierarchy (or social stratification, or inequality)
 - hierarchy is created, maintained, and expanded by individuals or groups who seek to gain wealth or power by exploiting others
 - example seeing the Indian caste system as exploitative:
 - the caste system originally grew out of some groups' efforts to retain power and wealth for themselves
 - preventing other groups from competing for it
 - evidence: lower castes have rebelled on occasion, and been suppressed by forces working for the upper castes
 - one way hierarchy could start would be by taking advantage of controlling surplus in a redistributive system
 - as Harris suggested in his article about the potlatch

- a person or group in control of pooled resources for redistribution has power over who gets what
 - may be limited by custom and demands for fairness
 - but skillful people could manipulate this to their advantage
 - eventually (maybe after generations), those in control of the stored surplus could begin to skim some off for themselves
 - now they are gaining not only power, but also wealth
 - which enhances power, too
 - eventually leading to a chief or ruler, and probably a surrounding court of nobility, who lives better than everyone else
 - and has power over everyone else: a hierarchy
 - or an institution with power and wealth, like a temple
 - operated by people who benefit from the institution's power and wealth
 - who have every reason to keep expanding its role, and their own power
- another way would be through military power
 - people might accept hierarchy as necessary for defense
 - a successful military leader might parlay that prestige and power into a permanent position atop a hierarchy
- and there are other theories, all based on individuals seeking their own advantage
- once a little hierarchy exists...
 - people may tend to work on working their way up it and building their own position, wherever they are in it
 - rather than resisting it, or rejecting inequality
 - anyone with experience in business or administration (military, university, etc.) knows that bureaucracies tend to grow...
 - people climbing the hierarchy and securing positions in it will create ever more levels and inequality
 - supporting the ideology that legitimizes and naturalizes the hierarchy
- These two views of hierarchy are ideologies (or cultural constructs) in themselves!
 - integrative theories lead to ideologies or worldviews attractive to those at the top of the hierarchy
 - they imply that hierarchy and the people at the top provide a needed function that justifies their higher status and power
 - exploitative theories lead to ideologies or worldviews attractive to those at the bottom
 - they imply that their low status and power is not their fault, but is imposed on them unfairly
- Next time, we will look at an example of an “exploitative” theory of socioeconomic hierarchy: the Marxian model of capitalism