



Topic 1

Issues of stratification

WS1^a

Student instructions

- Cut out the quotations below.
- Take each quotation in turn and decide if you agree with what it says about stratification and power in society. Create two piles — an 'agree' pile and a 'disagree' pile.
- If you cannot decide as a group about a particular quotation, you should put it to one side until the end and go back to it. If you still cannot agree, leave it and explain why to the class and teacher when it is your group's turn to report back at the end of the lesson.
- You will need to decide on a group spokesperson to report back to the class. It might be useful if a 'scribe' takes some brief notes about your discussions and decisions.

Quotations

1 'Class' is a word which has a number of different meanings in sociology as well as in everyday life. Beyond a fairly basic level of complexity, all known societies are stratified — that is, differentiated according to one or more principles of classification, which is usually hierarchical.

(Crompton (1999) *Sociology: Issues and Debates*)

2 The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class conflict.

(Marx and Engels (1848) *The Communist Manifesto*)

3 Social stratification...is more than just social inequality. Structured social inequalities can occur around a variety of social differences, and they may involve a wide range of resources, capacities and possessions.

(Scott (1996) *Stratification and Power*)

4 Capitalist industrial societies are still stratified, and theories of social class still provide us with essential insights into the manner in which established inequalities in wealth and power associated with production and markets, access to educational and organisational resources and so on have systematically served to perpetuate these inequalities over time.

(Crompton (1993) *Class and Stratification*)

5 The social stratification of a population, then, involves the formation of its members into a system of social strata that are distinguished from one another by their life chances and their life styles and by the particular causal mechanisms that are responsible for these.

(Scott (1996) *Stratification and Power*)



Topic 1 Issues of stratification

WS1^a

6 [Social classes]...are groupings of social agents, defined principally but not exclusively by their place in the production process, i.e. in the economic sphere. The economic place of the social agents has a principal role in determining social classes. But from that we cannot conclude that this economic place is sufficient to determine social classes: Marxism states that the economic does indeed have the determinant role in a mode of production or a social formation; but the political and the ideological (the superstructure) also have a very important role.

(Poulantzas (1975) *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*)

7 It will be useful at this juncture to say what class is not. First, a class is not a specific 'entity' — that is to say, a bounded social form in the way in which a business firm or a university is — and a class has no publicly sanctioned identity. It is extremely important to stress this, since established linguistic usage often encourages us to apply active verbs to the term 'class'...similarly, it is perhaps misleading to speak of 'membership' of a class, since this might be held to imply participation in a definite 'group'. Secondly, class has to be distinguished from 'stratum', and class theory from the study of 'stratification' as such...finally, we must distinguish clearly between class and elite.

(Giddens (1980) *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*)

8 Inequalities associated with the class system are founded upon two interlocking, but conceptually distinct, social processes. One is the allocation of rewards attaching to different positions in the social system; the other is the process of recruitment to these positions.

(Parkin (1972) *Class Inequality and Political Order*)

9 By the powerful we mean, of course, those who are able to realise their will, even if others resist it.

(Mills (1956) *The Power Elite*)

10 Power we define as the determination of others' behaviour in accordance with one's own ends. Any social structure can be viewed as a power system, and in speaking of stratification we often have in mind the general outline of this power system.

(Davis (1942) *A Conceptual Analysis of Stratification*)

11 The crucial power of any group results not from its interest group activity but rather from its structural position in the economy...decisions taken by large companies or city institutions have an almost immediate direct effect on the economy, and thus on the government's prospects of re-election. Groups with such power cannot be ignored...

(Marsh (1983) *Pressure Politics: Interest Groups in Britain*)



Topic 1 Issues of stratification

WS1^a

12 The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers.
(Marx and Engels (1848) *The Communist Manifesto*)

13 ...male orientation may so colour the organisation of sociology as a discipline that the invisibility of women is a structured male view, rather than a superficial flaw. The male focus, incorporated into the definitions of subject areas, reduces women to a side issue from the start.
(Oakley (1974) *The Sociology of Housework*)

14 Inequality, it is said, is the price that has to be paid for economic efficiency. The argument is that attempts to divide the pie more equally shrink it — and conversely, the more unequally the pie is divided the bigger it will grow. A capitalist society is by its nature unequal and so faces a trade-off: the more unequal it is, the more economically efficient it becomes. Without the incentives offered by inequality, either as a reward or punishment, a capitalist economy simply loses its dynamism...there needs to be fear and greed in the system in order to make it tick.
(Hutton (1996) *The State We're In*)

15 Every extra trained, employed worker contributes to a fairer society, as well as a more prosperous one. With social failure, from school drop-outs to crime, comes economic failure. Fairness and enterprise go together. It is up to government to do everything it can to help ensure that no individual and no community is left behind.
(New Labour Manifesto for the 2001 general election)

16 At the very least, it seems that the questions that class analysis was designed to address remain as important as ever.
(Crompton (1999) *Sociology: Issues and Debates*)

17 Britain is becoming a classless society.
(John Major, while Conservative Prime Minister during the 1990s)

18 While people in their everyday lives may, indeed, now be less likely to identify themselves in class terms, this does not mean that class relations, as objective realities, have disappeared.
(Scott (1996) *Stratification and Power*)

19 In the traditional models, people were socialised into worlds of home and work in which they 'knew their place'. They joined a class, learned its values, developed its attitudes and behaved accordingly — again throughout their lifetimes. These fairly rigid boundaries have now gone.
(Thrift and Johnston (1993) in Savage (1996) *Social Change and the Middle Classes*)



Topic 1 Issues of stratification

WS1^a

20 All these new myths of classlessness, however, and their implications for the conceptual structure of sociology, command little support among many of the academics who have been associated with empirical class analysis. They complain of the tendency of the relevant authors to treat speculative assertions about the direction in which all societies are supposedly heading as if they were securely established fact. (Lee and Turner (1996) *Conflicts About Class*)

21 A strong society rests on responsible individuals and families. They need to be able to turn to straightforward, reliable help when times are bad. But that should not become dependence on the state when times are good...the next Conservative government will help build a stronger society. We will provide support for individuals and families...and we will encourage people to take responsibility for themselves...

(Conservative Party Manifesto for the 2001 general election)

22 Different people have different degrees of freedom. The fact that they differ in their freedom of choice, in the range of actions they may decide to take, is the essence of social inequality...some people are more free than others; their range of choice is wider...

(Bauman (1990) *Thinking Sociologically*)

23 Black women are oppressed not only by their gender but by the intersection of class, 'race' and gender. On the whole they suffer the worst of all groups in terms of disadvantage.

(Abbott and Wallace (1997) *An Introduction to Sociology: Feminist Perspectives*)

24 Class is still a conceptual necessity for understanding the dynamics of society, but the restructuring of its processes and the decline of old class identities and cultures has coincided with a proliferation and dispersal of other political and social antagonisms. (Rutherford (1990) *Identity*)

25 For the past 15 years or so, it has become commonplace to argue — or to merely assume — that class is an outmoded concern. Commonplace in as much as media gurus often read the signs of the new times they see that way. Commonplace in as much as many politicians, too, take class to be a thing of the past...it is not a new notion of course...unpredictability, together with various features of [social] shifts themselves, encouraged post-modernist views that flux prevails where there was once thought to be structure. The notion of class structure became a prime victim of such views. But, it is one thing to explain this change of fashion that denies class structure. It is quite another to test it by reference to logic and fact.

(Westergaard (1996) *Class Today: Fashion at Odds with Facts*)



Topic 1

Issues of stratification



Extension activity 1.1

The quotations listed below concern the following themes or issues:

- > What is stratification?
- > What is class?
- > Who has power?
- > What is the future of inequality in society?

Take each quotation in turn and identify the following:

- > What perspective would say this?
- > What does it mean? (Rewrite the quotation in your own words in order to demonstrate this.)

Write your answers on a separate piece of paper.

- 1 'Class' is a word which has a number of different meanings in sociology as well as in everyday life. Beyond a fairly basic level of complexity, all known societies are stratified — that is, differentiated according to one or more principles of classification, which is usually hierarchical.

(Crompton (1999) *Sociology: Issues and Debates*)

- 2 The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class conflict.

(Marx and Engels (1848) *The Communist Manifesto*)

- 3 Social stratification...is more than just social inequality. Structured social inequalities can occur around a variety of social differences, and they may involve a wide range of resources, capacities and possessions.

(Scott (1996) *Stratification and Power*)

- 4 Capitalist industrial societies are still stratified, and theories of social class still provide us with essential insights into the manner in which established inequalities in wealth and power associated with production and markets, access to educational and organisational resources and so on have systematically served to perpetuate these inequalities over time.

(Crompton (1993) *Class and Stratification*)

- 5 The social stratification of a population, then, involves the formation of its members into a system of social strata that are distinguished from one another by their life chances and their life styles and by the particular causal mechanisms that are responsible for these.

(Scott (1996) *Stratification and Power*)



Topic 1 Issues of stratification

WS1^b

- 6 [Social classes]...are groupings of social agents, defined principally but not exclusively by their place in the production process, i.e. in the economic sphere. The economic place of the social agents has a principal role in determining social classes. But from that we cannot conclude that this economic place is sufficient to determine social classes. Marxism states that the economic does indeed have the determinant role in a mode of production or a social formation; but the political and the ideological (the superstructure) also have a very important role.

(Poulantzas (1975) *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*)

- 7 It will be useful at this juncture to say what class is not. First, a class is not a specific 'entity' — that is to say, a bounded social form in the way in which a business firm or a university is — and a class has no publicly sanctioned identity. It is extremely important to stress this, since established linguistic usage often encourages us to apply active verbs to the term 'class'...similarly, it is perhaps misleading to speak of 'membership' of a class, since this might be held to imply participation in a definite 'group'. Secondly, class has to be distinguished from 'stratum', and class theory from the study of 'stratification' as such...finally, we must distinguish clearly between class and elite.

(Giddens (1980) *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*)

- 8 Inequalities associated with the class system are founded upon two interlocking, but conceptually distinct, social processes. One is the allocation of rewards attaching to different positions in the social system; the other is the process of recruitment to these positions.

(Parkin (1972) *Class Inequality and Political Order*)

- 9 By the powerful we mean, of course, those who are able to realise their will, even if others resist it.

(Mills (1956) *The Power Elite*)

- 10 Power we define as the determination of others' behaviour in accordance with one's own ends. Any social structure can be viewed as a power system, and in speaking of stratification we often have in mind the general outline of this power system.

(Davis (1942) *A Conceptual Analysis of Stratification*)

- 11 The crucial power of any group results not from its interest group activity but rather from its structural position in the economy...decisions taken by large companies or city institutions have an almost immediate direct effect on the economy, and thus on the government's prospects of re-election. Groups with such power cannot be ignored...

(Marsh (1983) *Pressure Politics: Interest Groups in Britain*)



Topic 1 Issues of stratification

WS1^b

- 12 The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers. (Marx and Engels (1848) *The Communist Manifesto*)
- 13 ...male orientation may so colour the organisation of sociology as a discipline that the invisibility of women is a structured male view, rather than a superficial flaw. The male focus, incorporated into the definitions of subject areas, reduces women to a side issue from the start. (Oakley (1974) *The Sociology of Housework*)
- 14 Inequality, it is said, is the price that has to be paid for economic efficiency. The argument is that attempts to divide the pie more equally shrink it — and conversely, the more unequally the pie is divided the bigger it will grow. A capitalist society is by its nature unequal and so faces a trade-off: the more unequal it is, the more economically efficient it becomes. Without the incentives offered by inequality, either as a reward or punishment, a capitalist economy simply loses its dynamism...there needs to be fear and greed in the system in order to make it tick. (Hutton (1996) *The State We're In*)
- 15 Every extra trained, employed worker contributes to a fairer society, as well as a more prosperous one. With social failure, from school drop-outs to crime, comes economic failure. Fairness and enterprise go together. It is up to government to do everything it can to help ensure that no individual and no community is left behind. (New Labour Manifesto for the 2001 general election)
- 16 At the very least, it seems that the questions that class analysis was designed to address remain as important as ever. (Crompton (1999) *Sociology: Issues and Debates*)
- 17 Britain is becoming a classless society. (John Major, while Conservative Prime Minister during the 1990s)
- 18 While people in their everyday lives may, indeed, now be less likely to identify themselves in class terms, this does not mean that class relations, as objective realities, have disappeared. (Scott (1996) *Stratification and Power*)
- 19 In the traditional models, people were socialised into worlds of home and work in which they 'knew their place'. They joined a class, learned its values, developed its attitudes and behaved accordingly — again throughout their lifetimes. These fairly rigid boundaries have now gone. (Thrift and Johnston (1993) in Savage (1996) *Social Change and the Middle Classes*)



Topic 1 Issues of stratification

WS1^b

- 20 All these new myths of classlessness, however, and their implications for the conceptual structure of sociology, command little support among many of the academics who have been associated with empirical class analysis. They complain of the tendency of the relevant authors to treat speculative assertions about the direction in which all societies are supposedly heading as if they were securely established fact. (Lee and Turner (1996) *Conflicts About Class*)
- 21 A strong society rests on responsible individuals and families. They need to be able to turn to straightforward, reliable help when times are bad. But that should not become dependence on the state when times are good...the next Conservative government will help build a stronger society. We will provide support for individuals and families...and we will encourage people to take responsibility for themselves... (Conservative Party Manifesto for the 2001 general election)
- 22 Different people have different degrees of freedom. The fact that they differ in their freedom of choice, in the range of actions they may decide to take, is the essence of social inequality...some people are more free than others: their range of choice is wider... (Bauman (1990) *Thinking Sociologically*)
- 23 Black women are oppressed not only by their gender but by the intersection of class, 'race' and gender. On the whole they suffer the worst of all groups in terms of disadvantage. (Abbott and Wallace (1997) *An Introduction to Sociology: Feminist Perspectives*)
- 24 Class is still a conceptual necessity for understanding the dynamics of society, but the restructuring of its processes and the decline of old class identities and cultures has coincided with a proliferation and dispersal of other political and social antagonisms. (Rutherford (1990) *Identity*)
- 25 For the past 15 years or so, it has become commonplace to argue — or to merely assume — that class is an outmoded concern. Commonplace in as much as media gurus often read the signs of the new times they see that way. Commonplace in as much as many politicians, too, take class to be a thing of the past...it is not a new notion of course...unpredictability, together with various features of [social] shifts themselves, encouraged post-modernist views that flux prevails where there was once thought to be structure. The notion of class structure became a prime victim of such views. But, it is one thing to explain this change of fashion that denies class structure. It is quite another to test it by reference to logic and fact. (Westergaard (1996) *Class Today: Fashion at Odds with Facts*)