
Theological Perspectives Of Social Stratification

Social Stratification is a term used to define the way in which different individuals and groups are ranked within society (O'Leary., 2007) (Carter, 2012). The status of people commonly paralleled to how many valued resources an individual may possess determines how society is stratified (Gusky., 1994). Status can also be determined by an individual's geographical location, wealth and income, ethnicity, gender, and even religious beliefs. What is commonly understood is that social stratification doesn't always benefit everyone as it does not take into consideration the influence of external factors such as poverty, inequalities, and prejudice faced in society (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 193-195, 2019) (Costa-Lopes, Dovidio, Pereira & Jost., 2013). The concept of social stratification is a common concept heard throughout many sociological theories, such as Functionalism, Conflict, and Symbolic Interactionism theories. Some theories argue that social stratification is a necessity to maintain societies' functionality, while other theories believe that social stratification only benefits some individuals (Barkan, pp. 204-207, 2013) (Carter, 2012). This essay will comprise of the different aspects of social stratification by looking into these theories to provide a greater understanding of society and consider the effect and influence that it has on individuals and society on a greater scale.

The Functionalism Theory, pioneered by theorist Emilé Durkheim describes society as a complex system being made up of multiple moving parts that each serve a needed purpose or function. These moving parts include institutions, structures, and individuals, such as schools, hospitals, and government, which all provide a crucial service to benefit society (Kemper., 1976) (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 197-198, 2019). In 1945, world-renowned sociologists Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore published the Davis-Moore thesis, which presented the argument in favor of social stratification stating that the more important society perceives a social role as, the greater the reward or incentive must be (Davis & Moore., 1945). They believed wholeheartedly that social stratification played an important role even if it continues to perpetuate the unequal value held between different employment positions. In any society, a number of tasks must be accomplished to allow society to function efficiently. According to Davis and Moore, there are certain jobs in society that are viewed as more valuable and prestigious than others, therefore the people who fill these positions should be rewarded more than others (Davis & Moore., 1945) (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 196-200, 2019). As stated by Davis and Moore, in society a firefighter's job is deemed more important than, for instance, a checkout operator. The checkout operator won't require the same amount of rigorous training or even the same skill level as a firefighter throughout their employment. They argued that if firefighters didn't receive the incentive of a higher income and benefits, they would be less willing to fulfill the role of a firefighter (Barkan, pp. 200-208, 2013). If the firefighter and checkout operator were paid the same amount, the firefighter would likely rather work in a much safer environment like a supermarket. Davis and Moore both believed that society rewarding 'more important work with higher income, prestige and power will encourage people to continue to work longer and harder for these rewards' (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 197-198, 2019). They also stated that if a job required more skill, the higher the incentive or income should be and that social stratification is necessary to promote excellence, productivity, and efficiency within society, thus giving people something to strive for (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 196-200, 2019) (Davis & Moore., 1945).

Functionalists believed individuals interact within society in a way that a certain balance can be achieved. Functionalism would describe social stratification as a normal reflection of the variance between an individual and their abilities. While Davis and Moore present a valid stance, it doesn't take into account the negative influence that social stratification can have on individuals (Seiyama., 2000). Sociologist Melvin Tumin questioned that the Davis-Moore thesis doesn't explain what exactly determines a job's degree of importance, as it is clear that there is a need for even the smallest of jobs regardless of the level of skill or training required (Tumin., 1985). According to Tumin, the thesis also does not consider the inequalities in the education system or inequalities individuals face due to their race or gender (Grusky, 1994). Tumin believed that social stratification prevented potentially qualified people from attempting to fill needed roles. For example, people from low socio-economic environments, have lower chances of achieving the same success as people from high socio-economic environments, because of the relative lack of opportunity and access to resources available to them to progress further in their desired field (Costa-Lopes, Dovidio, Pereira & Jost., 2013) (Tumin.,1985). Tumin argued that Davis & Moore's thesis also fails to explain how a basketball player would be able to earn millions of dollars a year when a doctor who saves lives or a soldier fighting for a country's rights and freedom will most likely not come close to earning millions over the span of their careers (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 197-199, 2019). Tumin., 1985) (Forbes LLC, 2014).

Pioneered by Karl Marx, Conflict Theory describes society as in a state of continuous perpetual conflict because of the uninterrupted competition for limited resources (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 197-199, 2019). Theorizing that social order is maintained through domination and power, rather than consensus and conformity. In keeping with Conflict Theory, those with greater wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, typically through keeping systems that benefit them in place which in turn suppresses the poor and powerless (Griffith, Strayer & Cody-Rydzewski., pp. 172-176, 2017).. Those who are on the bottom of the social stratification scale have little to no opportunity to improve their situation, as those on top hold society's economic and political power (Kemper., 1976). Max Weber later further refined Marx's theory believing that while the basic premise of conflict theory is individuals and groups of higher social ranking within society working harder to maximize their own benefits, there are multiple layers of conflict existing at any given moment in any given society. He added that there is an emotional component to his ideas about conflict, stating that the influence of social interaction in regards to conflict can generate beliefs and solidarity between individuals and groups within society, thus having a negative impact on greater society through a way of separatism (Hier., pp. 225-227, 2005). Specifically, regarding how an individual will react to society's inequalities depending on the stratified group they are associated with, as well as whether they perceive those in power to be legitimate or simply seeking personal gain (Seiyama.,2000). Both Marx and Weber argue that social stratification is entirely dysfunctional and harmful to society in the long run. Through the hierarchy of individuals, social stratification benefits the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and creates a system of winners and losers that is maintained by those of higher ranking (Griffith, Strayer & Cody-Rydzewski., pp. 170-172, 2017). (Hier., pp. 226-229, 2005). Those on the lower end of the scale do not get a fair chance to compete, and therefore little opportunity to improve their situations. This competitive and fixed system ends up creating and further upholding stratification systems, where upper powers work for their own interests while ignoring and exploiting the poor (Griffith, Strayer & Cody-Rydzewski., pp. 170, 2017).

While both Functionalism Theory and Conflict Theory analyze society from a macro-level perspective, Symbolic Interactionism goes deeper to analyze individuals from a micro-level

perspective. The theory focuses on the interaction of individuals and how they interpret these interactions based on their own experiences (Quist-Adade., 2018). Individuals change their behaviors based on their interactions with objects, events, people, and their ideas (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 195-197, 2019). Symbolic Interactionism can be examined through people's social standing, and how it affects the everyday interactions and understandings of individuals in their daily lives (Carter., 2012). By examining social stratification from a micro-level perspective, the differences that social stratification makes in an individuals' lifestyle, as well as their interactions with others, can be identified. First theorized by George Herbert Mead, it was thought that individuals act according to their interpretation of the meaning of their world. In society, people tend to interact primarily with others who share the same social standing as they do (Hier., pp. 91-96, 2005) (Chan et al., 2009). This can mean people that share the same income level, the same level of education, same cultural identity, and even the same tastes in music, food, and clothing. It is because of social stratification that people tend to work, live, and continue to associate with others they share similarities with (Griffith, Strayer & Cody-Rydzewski., pp. 174, 2017).

Symbolic Interactionism can better be described as a lens we use to view reality (Giddens., 2011). This can differ from person to person. A person's social standing can be symbolically communicated through their use of material items, as people often engage in what is called conspicuous consumption, known as the purchasing and use of certain products with aims to make a symbolic statement of status over the product's function (Velblen., 2005) (Furlong & Cartmel., 2007). The premise of symbolic interaction theory is that people behave based on what they believe and what they see rather than what is objectively true. We are constantly bombarded with the idea that the materialistic items you own symbolize your ranking status within society. As time has progressed, technology has advanced, designer name brands evolved, and consumerism continues to rise without consideration of the true value and necessity of material goods (Hier., pp. 225-230, 2005) (Yam, 2016). A \$15,000 Toyota Corolla will provide the same means of transportation as easily as a \$150,000 Mercedes-Benz vehicle, but owning the luxury car presents a superior social statement far more impressive than the Corolla. While this can also be attributed to the way these items are marketed to the public, it is inevitable that the social ranking that an individual is associated with can predetermine how they are treated within society as well as allow them to afford such luxuries (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 193-195, 2019).

The influence of social stratification is evident throughout each of these theological perspectives. The effects of social stratification can affect an individuals' daily life in regards to the decisions they make, the career they choose, how they interact with others, and the resources they have access to. While the functionalism theory presents social stratification as a necessary and inevitable method to encourage people of higher intelligence, knowledge, and skill base to aim for 'important' occupations, Conflict theory states that social stratification is neither necessary nor inevitable but is a result of lack of opportunity, discrimination and prejudice (Davis & Moore., 1945) (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 197-199, 2019). Symbolic interactionism theory states that social stratification affects and influences the beliefs individuals form, their lifestyles, daily interactions, and conceptions of themselves (Hier., pp. 91-97, 2005). Unconsciously, individuals exhibit their social status through material goods by purchasing and sporting luxurious goods (Ballantine, Roberts & Korgen., pp. 193-196, 2019). Regardless of our awareness, the outcomes of social stratification are evident in today's society and while this

may not favor all, it is the result of our own making through its persistence over time.