

Sociology 24: Introduction to Social Inequality
Spring 2014
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-2:00
Sever Hall 213
<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k99585>

Instructor: Jason Beckfield
Email: jbeckfie@wjh.harvard.edu
Office Hours: Tues 9-10, Thurs 1-2

Teaching Fellow:
Asad Asad, email: asad@fas
Office Hours: by appointment

OVERVIEW

Welcome to *Introduction to Social Inequality*. In this course, we will identify the basic contours of the structure of social inequality in the United States through engagement with original, classic sociological research on class, race, and gender. Through our reading and active participation in lectures, we will develop answers to the central question that motivates much sociological inquiry into inequality: Who gets what, and why?

OBJECTIVES

In this introductory course on social inequality, we will:

1. Develop a descriptive and analytical understanding of social stratification.
2. Explore central concepts through which sociologists investigate inequality.
3. Become familiar with key debates that animate contemporary research on inequality.
4. Consider and critique competing explanations for social stratification.

REQUIREMENTS

In service of our objectives for the course, you are asked to:

1. Engage the reading. A key part of this course is regular and thoughtful consideration of the texts. It is essential that you complete the assigned reading before each and every class session.
2. Contribute to the discussion in class and in section (10% of final grade).
3. Write a response to the assigned reading for each day of class (except during shopping period). Your response should do two things: accurately summarize a central argument in the reading, and develop a coherent reaction to that argument. You may use the prompts below. Three missed assignments are allowed. The response papers are due at the start of class, and are graded complete/incomplete (40% of your final grade).
4. Take a midterm examination (20% of your final grade), or write a paper that reviews the development of the sociological literature (>20 studies) on a topic that you choose from those covered in the first three books.
5. Take a final examination (30% of your final grade), or write a paper that reviews the development of the sociological literature (>20 studies) on a topic that you choose from those covered in the last six books.

POLICIES

To prevent misunderstandings, we agree to the following policies for this course:

1. Given that we will address sensitive and controversial topics of race, class, gender and sexuality in this course, a bearing of mutual respect is assumed.
2. As the semester progresses, I may elect to modify this syllabus.
3. Late midterm/final papers will be automatically graded lower, at the rate of ½ letter grade per day. Late response papers will receive a grade of incomplete.
4. Students should be aware that in this course collaboration of any sort on the paper assignments is not permitted. This means that you may not discuss your paper assignments with other students. All work should be entirely your own and must use appropriate citation practices to acknowledge the use of books, articles, websites, lectures, discussions, etc., that you have consulted to complete your assignments (you may find the American Sociological Association Style Guide a useful resource).
5. Many students find it useful to form study groups to prepare for exams; I encourage this sort of preparation if you find it useful.

REQUIRED READING

The texts listed below are available for purchase online and at the Harvard COOP. They are also on reserve at the Lamont Library.

Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life, by Annette Lareau. California, 2nd ed., 2011.

Questions to guide your reading:

1. What is the question that guided Lareau's research?
2. What does Lareau cast her work against? That is, who/what does she think is wrong, and why does she think that?
3. How did Lareau go about doing the research to answer her question? What are her data? What "dilemmas of fieldwork" does she identify?
4. How are the childrearing strategies of these families similar? How do they differ? How do those differences and similarities matter?
5. What did Lareau expect to find before she started her study? Which expectations were confirmed? What were the surprises?
6. What is a sense of entitlement? What is a sense of constraint? Why does Lareau think these things are important for understanding inequality?
7. What roles do race and gender play in the families that Lareau studied?
8. For each chapter, ask yourself: why did Lareau select this family to illustrate her argument?
9. Why do middle-class parents raise their children in the way that Lareau shows? Why do working-class and poor parents follow different strategies?
10. Does Lareau's study help you to understand your own experiences? Why or why not? More broadly, what does Lareau say about whether her findings should generalize?

Concepts:

1. Cultural repertoire
2. Social structure
3. Institution
4. Class (categorical vs. gradational)
5. Inequality
6. Habitus
7. Capital
8. Field
9. Mobility
10. Open society
11. Class society

Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth, by Claude Fischer et al. Princeton, 1996.

Questions to guide your reading:

1. What question are the authors trying to answer? Is this the same question that the authors of *The Bell Curve* are trying to answer?
2. On pp. 44-46, the authors give an example of how a race-neutral college admissions process will pass on race-correlated disparities. How does this work?
3. What are the steps taken by Fischer et al. to dismantle the argument of Herrnstein and Murray? If H&M are so wrong, why did their work get so much attention?
4. In what way is inequality in the United States “by design”? How do the authors argue less inequality could be designed? What do they see as the costs of less inequality?
5. Why do the authors make so much of the visibility vs. invisibility of policy choices?

Concepts:

1. Inequality
2. Mobility
3. Middle class
4. Socioeconomic Status (SES)
5. Intelligence
6. Paradigm
7. Measurement
8. Validity (predictive validity, criterion validity, construct validity)
9. Reliability
10. Poverty
11. Wealth
12. Income inequality
13. Opportunity
14. Redistribution

Getting a Job: A Study of Contacts and Careers, by Mark Granovetter. Chicago, 2nd ed., 1995.

Questions to guide your reading:

1. How does Granovetter gather data for his study? What biases are introduced by this data collection technique?
2. This work is famous for introducing the idea that markets are “embedded” in social relations. What does “embeddedness” mean?
3. What does this work contribute to the big question of Sociology 24: Who gets what, and why?
4. This book was written well before the advent of social media, and things like Facebook. Do you think its arguments still apply today?

Concepts:

1. Social mobility
2. Opportunity
3. Market
4. Occupation
5. Formal vs. informal job search
6. Intensive vs. extensive job search
7. Social network
8. Causal effects
9. Strong vs. weak ties
10. Information
11. Vacancy chains
12. Information chains
13. Career
14. Job tenure
15. Open society
16. Rationality
17. Particularism
18. Organization

The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions, by William Julius Wilson. Chicago, 2nd ed., 1980.

Questions to guide your reading:

1. What does Wilson mean by *race relations*? What is the difference between paternalistic and competitive race relations?
2. How do orthodox Marxist theory and the split-labor market theory of racial antagonism differ?
3. How does Wilson argue that the polity and the economy are important for race relations in the United States?
4. What evidence supports Wilson's main argument that race is declining in significance?
5. What are three ways that Wilson's main argument has been misunderstood?

Concepts:

1. Race relations
2. Class
3. Underclass
4. Intersection
5. Institution
6. Life chances
7. Political economy
8. Class-in-itself vs. class-for-itself
9. Segregation
10. Jim Crow
11. Migration (push factors, pull factors)
12. Ghetto
13. Structure
14. Segmented labor market
15. Discrimination

American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass, by Douglas S. Massey and Nancy Denton. Harvard, reprint ed., 1998.

Questions to guide your reading:

1. If Massey and Denton are right, who or what is wrong?
2. What causes segregation? What are its consequences?
3. In what way has public policy “failed” according to Massey & Denton?
4. This text, like *Inequality by Design*, treats policy as a key cause of inequality. How are the accounts of the role of policy in inequality similar across these two texts? How are they different?

Concepts:

1. Segregation
2. Racism
3. Poverty
4. Isolation
5. Concentration
6. Culture of poverty
7. Welfare dependency
8. Institutional racism
9. Institution
10. Ghetto
11. Oppositional culture
12. Index of dissimilarity
13. Migration
14. Assimilation
15. Enclave
16. Redlining
17. Suburbanization
18. Hypersegregation
19. Audit studies
20. Spatial mobility
21. Mechanism

The Diversity Paradox: Immigration and the Color Line in Twenty-First Century America, by Jennifer Lee and Frank D. Bean. Sage, 2011.

Questions to guide your reading:

1. What is the diversity paradox?
2. This book is somewhat unusual in giving roughly equal weight to quantitative and qualitative evidence. Why do the authors choose to do this? What lessons are learned uniquely from each kind of information?
3. How is diversity distributed across the United States? What, according to the authors, causes this geographical variation in intermarriage and identity?
4. How do parents from interracial marriages identify their children, and how does this vary across interracial combinations?

Concepts:

1. Color line (tri-racial, black-nonblack, white-nonwhite)
2. Race
3. Ethnicity
4. Immigration
5. Intermarriage
6. Social distance
7. Multiracial identity
8. Census definitions of racial and ethnic groups
9. Cohort effect
10. Compositional effect
11. Hyperdiversity
12. Cultural capital
13. Modes of incorporation
14. Cultural boundaries
15. Mobility
16. Hyperdescent
17. Hypodescent
18. Endogamy
19. Exogamy
20. Ascription
21. Institution

The Second Shift, by Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung. Penguin, reissue ed., 2003.

Questions to guide your reading:

1. What is the stalled revolution? Why is it important for understanding inequality in the contemporary United States?
2. Recently, there has been much debate over whether women can “have it all,” as it is usually phrased. Witness the article by Anne-Marie Slaughter in *The Atlantic Monthly*, the Harvard Crimson series *Can Harvard Women Have it All?*, and the recent book *Lean In* by a leading female manager. Why are we still discussing this, three decades after *The Second Shift*?
3. Compare the data-collection method Hochschild uses to that used by the other authors whose books we read (including the next two).

Concepts:

1. Second shift
2. Stalled revolution
3. Care work
4. Gender strategy
5. Gender ideology
6. Gender
7. Marriage gradient
8. Feeling rules
9. Class
10. Frontstage/backstage
11. Gender gap
12. Occupational sex segregation

Manhood in America: A Cultural History, by Michael Kimmel. Oxford, 2nd ed., 2006.

Questions to guide your reading:

1. What are the areas of agreement and disagreement between Hochschild and Kimmel?
2. Why, according to Kimmel, is it important to understand cultural history, if one's aim is to understand gender inequality?
3. Sociologists differentiate sex (biology) from gender (culture). What does Kimmel's work contribute to understanding that differentiation?
4. How strong is the case that there is currently a crisis of masculinity in the US?
5. How do the historical shifts in race relations discussed by Wilson figure into the evolution of masculinity discussed by Kimmel? More broadly, according to Kimmel, where do race and gender intersect?

Concepts:

1. Masculinity
2. Femininity
3. Sex
4. Sexuality
5. Institution
6. Patriarchy
7. Separate spheres
8. Homosociality
9. Exclusion

Just One of the Guys? Transgender Men and the Persistence of Gender Inequality, by Kristen Schilt. Chicago, 2010.

Questions to guide your reading:

1. Why does Schilt begin with the anecdote about former Harvard president Lawrence Summers? What is the broader relevance?
2. Two key aspects of gender inequality in the labor market are occupational sex segregation and the gender pay gap. What does Schilt's work contribute to understanding these phenomena?
3. Schilt's study is an example of sociological research about difficult-to-study populations. What are the strengths and limits of her approach?
4. What are the relative roles of biological difference and social process in the workplaces Schilt studies?

Concepts:

1. Social constructionism
2. Gender difference
3. Gender inequality
4. Transgender
5. Socialization
6. Cisgender
7. Passability
8. Institution
9. Opportunity
10. Embodiment
11. Token
12. Structure
13. Cultural logic
14. Homosocial reproduction
15. Doing gender

PART I: INTRODUCTION

- 1/28: Who gets what, and why?
- 1/30: Sociological approaches to social inequality

PART II: CLASS

- 2/4: Lareau, preface to the second edition, chapters 1-2, and appendix A-D
- 2/6: Lareau, chapters 3-5
- 2/11: Lareau, chapters 6-9
- 2/13: Lareau, chapters 10-13 and afterword
- 2/18: Fischer et al, chapters 1-3 and appendix 1
- 2/20: Fischer et al, chapters 4-6 and appendix 2
- 2/25: Fischer et al, chapters 7-9
- 2/27: Granovetter, introduction, chapters 1-7, and appendix A
- 3/4: Granovetter, chapters 8-10 and afterword

PART III: RACE

- 3/6: Wilson, chapters 1-4
- 3/11: Wilson, chapters 5-8
- 3/13: **Midterm examination**
- 3/25: Massey & Denton, chapters 1-4
- 3/27: Massey & Denton, chapters 5-8
- 4/1: Lee & Bean, chapters 1-4 and appendix
- 4/3: Lee & Bean, chapters 5-8

PART IV: GENDER

- 4/8: Hochschild & Machung, chapters 1-11
- 4/10: Hochschild & Machung, chapters 12-17
- 4/15: Kimmel, introduction, part one, and part two
- 4/17: Kimmel, part three, part four, and epilogue
- 4/22: Schilt, chapters 1-5 and methodological appendix
- 4/24: Schilt, chapters 6-7
- 4/29: Conclusion