

Year 12 Social Stratification Assignment.

By George Amos

Gender as a form of Social Stratification.

The most common explanation for divisions between men and women is that the male 'sex' is stronger, more intelligent and more of a 'natural' leader. Women however according to biological determinism are generally seen as child bearers and instinctively house keepers. Although this is widely considered a biological point of view, sociologists like Talcott Parsons (1959) have tended to lean towards this idea.

In addition to age, gender is one of the universal dimensions on which status differences are based. Unlike sex, which is a biological concept, gender is a social construct specifying the socially and culturally prescribed roles that men and women are to follow. According to Gerda Lerner in *The Creation of Patriarchy*, gender is the "costume, a mask, a straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance" (p.23). As Alan Wolfe observed in "The Gender Question" (*The New Republic*, June 6:27-34), "of all the ways that one group has systematically mistreated another, none is more deeply rooted than the way men have subordinated women. All other discriminations pale by contrast." Lerner argues that the subordination of women preceded all other subordinations and that to rid ourselves of all of those other "isms"--racism, classism, ageism, etc.it is sexism that must first be eradicated.

Socialisation is the most important process in a person's life, permitting the development of an individuals social capacities, as well as learning norms and values that permit adequate participation in society. During this process, the family is one of the most important social environments, in that it permits the connection with the social structure. To a large extent, a child's development possibilities depend on his/her family's characteristics and socio-economic position in society. Socialisation also implies social *differentiation*, as it prepares boys and girls to be part of a specific social group.

The socialisation process is crucial for the internalisation of the social and cultural reality. The process is also highly charged with emotions: boys and girls identify with these realities, which determine what

contents and aspects they consider important enough to be part of their own norms, values and lives. The process of primary socialisation goes beyond a merely cognitive learning process and remains firmly rooted in the conscience of girls and boys – to a much greater extent than any subsequent secondary socialisations.

Gender role socialisation is carried on by parents who choose blue for boys and pink for girls. Blue is a cold colour where as pink is warm and these colours are used for cards, clothing and even maternity ward tags. Boys are taught to be leaders, strong, active, dominating, and never showing weakness. Girls on the other hand are taught to be caring, looked after and to be good-natured and well-mannered. As girls become women they are socialised into roles such as a wife and mother and taught that it is a desirable life choice to settle down. This leads to women not having access to as many life chances as men, and being reliant on the opposite sex for income, all attributes that lead to less independence for women. Even when women do dispel these gender roles and seek to become more independent they often face employers that do not share the same views. It is common for the employer to assume that a female employee will want to take leave to have children, and even though there are laws that prohibit employers asking such questions during interviews, this doesn't stop this being a common view.

Education is different from other forms of socialisation such as family because it involves an instruction that is deliberate expression of a formal institution. Institutions promote the values of the dominant culture. There is probably less variation in what children learn from schooling than what they learn as a result of informal interactions with the family or friends. For non-white people, family and cultural identity is seen as a necessary tool to counteract the effects of an institution actively promotes and sustains an unequal position when compared to their white counterparts.

There is some support for this position in "Introductory sociology" which states that the 1944 Education Act was designed to allow fair access to schooling for not only boys but also girls. There were two reasons for widening access to education by the Government.

1. To encourage a fairer society.
2. This was linked to national prosperity and the recognition of a large untapped source of labour lay in the abilities of working class boys and girls.

The Marxist's view is that working class education is fragmented, there are lots of subjects and there is no time to really learn any subject to a meaningful degree. Thus education is geared to methods of control, which prepare young working class people for the factory floor. According to Brown and Gintis (1976 p.42) [d3N19nEw1](#)

"Schools do different things to different children, boys and girls, black and

white, rich and poor are treated differently. Affluent suburban schools,

working class schools and ghetto (black) schools all exhibit [george1986's structuralism](#) .

different patterns"

Schools for working class encourage "docility, obedience and rule following which they will experience in their working lives in factories and shops". Schools whose students are from wealthy backgrounds encourage leadership ability as suitable for a future elite. The effects of this can be seen in any study of senior management, which shows that white males dominate the senior positions, with a few white females. There are so few non-white senior managers of either sex that they do not make up any meaningful statistic. According to this theory, working class workers have no control over the production of work, leading to greater profits. The fragmentation of educational subjects is linked to the fragmentation of tasks at work and education can be seen as playing a part in encouraging inequality across generations.

This model of reality has forced students to internalise the need to get a university education so that as workers they can exercise more choice over their livelihood - education is heavily linked to future pay packets. [I](#)

Although it's fairly clear (from writers such as Mead and Oakley) that the primary socialisation process within the family group is influential in terms of creating different gender roles and identities, it doesn't necessarily follow from this that we can easily establish the extent to which these differences translate into educational differences. In one sense, therefore, we are faced with a classic "chicken and egg" situation. That is, which comes first: Do differences in gender socialisation within the family group translate into educational differences and work role differences or do changes in the workplace

and education system "filter down" to the family group, producing differences in the gender socialisation process?

The overall picture is, of course, further complicated by recent changes in the relative educational achievements of males and females.

In the past, it was possible to suggest that parental socialisation produced clear differences in the perceptions and expectations of male and female children (for example, the expectation that males would enter the labour market on a full-time, life-long, basis, whereas the primary female adult role would be a child-rearing, domestic labour, one).

The fact that girls underperformed in the education system was explained in a variety of ways. For example, Abbot and Wallace ("Feminist Perspectives") identify four major areas of the hidden curriculum that apparently disadvantage girls:

- a. The academic hierarchy.
- b. Stereotyped attitudes.
- c. Textbooks.
- d. Subject choice and activities.

These ideas, however important they may or may not prove to be, are beyond the hidden curriculum and the immediate scope of this particular section and are discussed in more detail in relation to the education system.

In the present, however, it is difficult to see how the recent and fairly rapid changes in overall female performance can be simply traced-back to primary gender socialisation. If anything, one might suspect that changes in wider society (the workplace, for example, and a general change in perceptions for male and female adult roles) are more likely to have contributed to a change in educational performance. In this respect, the argument here is that the secondary socialisation process is more likely to have influenced male / female social development than the primary socialisation process within the family.

Many of us have been brought up to believe that there are certain jobs for men and certain jobs for women. These beliefs, which have been reinforced by the media and tradition, are so strongly internalised that when we hear of male nurses or female plumbers it actually shocks us. In fact in western society men who perform traditionally more feminine jobs are so few and far between that they have been considered

leaders in social change and the phrase 'new man' has been applied to this group.

Weitzman et al carried out a content analysis of pre-school children's books, finding several clear differences in gender roles. For example, males tended to engage in adventurous, outdoor pursuits, which demanded independence and strength. Girls cooked and cleaned for the males, or waited their return. Content analysis of TV advertising showed that women in advertising are more likely to be young and blond. Men are more likely than women to be shown in a professional work setting.

Sociologists have been highly sceptical of this idea for argument for a long time, but as sociology was largely male dominated since its conception the point of gender as a pose to sex was not discussed widely. Ann Oakley (1972), among others, was one of the first sociologists to note this difference. She argues that gender roles change from society to society and can even change within a single society over a period of time. Differences between men and women are as much socially produced as they are biological. This idea has now become the most widely accepted idea.

It is neither patronising nor sexist to assume that women are socially subordinate to men as this is a measured reality. This concept is a starting point for feminist analysis.

It now seems evident that men also have greater social mobility than women. Social mobility is defined as the ability to move between social strata's. Marshall et al (1988) state that their research shows that men have higher absolute rates of mobility than women, receive higher rewards and are more highly paid for their qualifications. Only 2 percent of highly qualified men are in routine non-manual jobs in comparison to 32 percent of equally qualified women.

Ethnicity as a form of Social Stratification.

Race is defined as a group of people who are perceived to be biologically different from another. It is largely socially constructed and does differ from one society to another. Ethnicity however is based on cultural characteristics and can be defined as a collection of people who share a distinctive cultural heritage.

Through the years of racial suffrage due to racism, many ways have been developed to resist racism and strengthen culture within these victimized communities. Modood a sociologist studied the sociology of ethnicity and realized that many Afro-Caribbean's celebrate Black Identities and Black pride as a response to Black people's perceptions of racial exclusion, discrimination and stereotyping by White people.

Culture within peoples lives can help them to resist racism and promote pride and resistance to racial discrimination, for example in many Black communities Hip-Hop music is a great influence to black culture, which therefore promotes the black communities which are therefore likely to be discriminated because of xenophobia.

Religion as part of people's culture also helps to resist racism. For example Rastafarians promote black pride through there religion, also using Music; Reggae is a response to black pride and peace promotion.

However some of these resistances may not work, for example, Skinheads in Britain have been traditionally known to listening to reggae but are also renowned for racism. Also Hip Hop as a form of racism resistance could have now been ruined as new acts like Eminem; white rappers which are very successful. Many Muslims have been racially discriminated because of their skin colour, however to be a Religion does not consist of being a race, for example a White male could convert himself to Islam and Christians come from many racial backgrounds.

Small subcultures, Street culture for example can provoke different types of racism, which may not be aimed at a particular race. Due to the culture of the streets, there are many integrated groups, of no particular race so therefore Racism cannot be resisted by this type of culture and not to forget that some cultures influence racism.

Stratification means that society is made up of different unequal groups. The things that make up these groups tends to persist across generations, e.g. the media regularly talks about a "welfare" class, usually single parents who themselves were from a single parent household, or the position of women in society. According to many sociologists, the issue of inequality is crucial for stratification. I agree with this and I believe that the most important area within inequality is the historic racism imposed by White people upon non-white people. The reason it is so important is because non-white people make up three-quarters of the human race and we are living in a global economic world. Ultimately, all scientific studies must have a moral

aspect and sociological study of the behaviour of society is no exception.

Other explanations of stratification include Class Stratification; Karl Marx is probably the most famous person to argue about the effect of class in society. Marx's argument is that society is really all about economics - who gets what and when. How economic reward influences access to political power and social status, so there are groups within society and these groups he calls classes, working, middle and upper. Karl Marx gives an explanation of inequality through "the Method of Production". The upper class has the most privilege because they are able to control the distribution of wealth while the working class has the least privilege and reward because they do not control how material reward is produced, so society is all about who controls the most wealth.

This inequality between groups is further understood if we understand that education has increasingly been linked to the demands of the economy so that subjects like science are valued over the creative subjects such as art or literature. Non-white people have historically been looked upon by white people as a disabled species and most definitely not there equal, even today in the modern world ethnic people are seen as the "servants" of man kind e.g. the role of black women in the NHS, black men in London Transport. The role and importance of schools has increased alongside the decline of the factory and the extended family whereby mum stayed at home to take care of the children, grandparents, providing support, lived close by and the male was the undisputed head of the family.

Neither the Marxist's nor Functionalist model of education explains the position of inequality of non-white people within the education system. However education achievement is still more valued for men rather than women or the non-white of either sex. Non-white people increasingly see the school as yet another form of dominion. The school is where theories of deviancy is applied and experienced by non-white people, for example the term "under achiever" is applied almost exclusively to black children, and this does not have any class, biological or psychological basis.

Schools encourage the isolation of non-white children in terms of promoting the dominant white moral value. Non-white experience as "under achievers" in school is transferred to the workplace (that is if they can get work) so that they have become the new disposable workforce, cycles of in and out contract and low paid work. The

combination of negative moral and sociological labelling first experienced by non-white people within the educational system promotes a pattern of inequality that has contributed to the increased levels of unemployment, poverty, ill health as can be seen by the numbers of non-white people in mental institutions, prisons, and unemployed. This secondary position is reflected in their weaker world position politically and economically.

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The Cress Theory of Colour (ISIS 1989) states that "The local and global power system structured and maintained by persons who classify themselves as white, whether consciously or subconsciously determined; this system consists of patterns of perception, logic symbol formation, thought, speech action and emotional response, as conducted simultaneously in all areas of people activity (economic, education, entertainment, labour, law, politics, religion, sex and war). The ultimate purpose of the system is to prevent white genetic annihilation on Earth - a planet in which the overwhelming majority of people are classified as non- white (Black, Brown, Red and Yellow) by white skinned people. All of the non-white people are genetically dominant (in terms of skin coloration compared to the genetically recessive white skinned people".

When the Cress concept is applied it supplies a valuable explanation in terms of family and gender politics for non-white people, the male, the female and family. For example, pro-life policies such as New Right Politics are firmly directed at encouraging the white female to reproduce whilst at the same time using terms such as "population explosion" to support the removal of welfare support for the Black female in America. Another example is the promotion of contraception for "third world" population, encouraging abortion for the non-white female and yet devising moral and religious arguments to support

terrorist attacks on private abortion clinics financially supported by white females seeking terminations.

Racism may be expressed individually and consciously, through explicit thoughts, feelings, or acts, or socially and unconsciously, through institutions that promote inequalities among "races". Although some speakers attempt to express a semantic distinction by using the word *racism* rather than *racialism* (or vice versa), many treat the terms as synonymous (see below).

Racism may be divided in three major subcategories: individual racism, structural racism, and ideological racism. Some categories of racism are:

Racial Prejudice is pre-formed personal opinions about individuals on the basis of their race. (E.g. John thinks that Mary will have bad attribute X solely because Mary is a member of race Y.)

Racial Discrimination is differences in treatment of people on the basis of characteristics which may be classified as racial, including skin color, cultural heritage, and religion. (e.g. Mary refuses to hire John because he is of race Y.)

Institutional racism or structural racial discrimination -- racial discrimination by governments, corporations, or other large organizations. (e.g. Mary cannot get a job, despite her qualifications, because she is of race Y.)

Cultural racial discrimination occurs when the assumption of inferiority of one or more races is built into the culturally maintained image of itself held by members of one culture. (e.g. Members of group X are taught to believe that they are members of a superior race, and, consequently, members of other races are inferior.)

Historical economic or social inequality is alleged to be a form of discrimination which is caused by past racism, affecting the present generation through deficits in the formal education and other kinds of preparation in the parents' generation, and, through primarily unconscious racist attitudes and actions on members of the general population. (E.g. A member of Race Y, Mary, has her opportunities adversely affected (directly and/or indirectly) by the mistreatment of her ancestors of race Y.) However, many people dispute the idea that this can be called racism; many hold that this view infantilizes members of a given ethnic group (e.g., blacks or Hispanics) and treats

an entire race as victims unable to improve themselves through their own efforts. In this opposing view, it would be "racist" to believe that a group is being held back by such concerns. Yet, some recent studies have suggested that this latter view may not be altogether plausible.

A good example of race relations policy is the Apartheid system that started in Africa in 1951.

The Bantu Authorities Act established a basis for ethnic government in African reserves, known as "homelands." These homelands were independent states to which each African was assigned by the government according to the record of origin (which was frequently inaccurate). All political rights, including voting, held by an African were restricted to the designated homeland. The idea was that they would be citizens of the homeland, losing their citizenship in South Africa and any right of involvement with the South African Parliament which held complete hegemony over the homelands. From 1976 to 1981, four of these homelands were created, denationalizing nine million South Africans. The homeland administrations refused the nominal independence, maintaining pressure for political rights within the country as a whole. Nevertheless, Africans living in the homelands needed passports to enter South Africa: aliens in their own country.

