

### 3.6 Social Stratification

#### 3.6.1 Functionalist theory of stratification

##### • Different views on the functionalist theory of stratification

##### Revision resources:

AQA Collins Textbook: Pages 260-261

Revision Guide: Page 94 - 97

Seneca: AQA GCSE Sociology – 5

Social strat – 5.1 Social stratification

YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-Wt5y0Uebk&t=575s>

#### Key points on stratification (you may want to use these points in your introductions):

The term **social stratification** describes the way society is structured into a hierarchy of **unequal strata (layers)**.

Stratification involves inequality between groups in the distribution of economic and social resources such as wealth, income, status and power.

In the UK today, social class, gender, ethnicity and age are the main criteria by which people tend to be stratified.

Stratification systems differ according to whether status (or social position) is ascribed (fixed at birth) or achieved (earned on the basis of merit). **They differ on whether or not they think society is meritocratic.** Meritocracy is a system in which people's achievements are based on their own talents and efforts rather than their social origins and backgrounds – in other words if society is meritocratic, everyone has the same chances.



#### The Functionalist theory of Stratification: Davis and Moore (1945)

Davis and Moore (1945) argue that all societies are stratified and all have social inequality. They argue **that stratification is necessary** because there needs to be a way of placing individuals into the different roles or social positions that must be filled (known as role allocation).

Davis and Moore believe that society is **meritocratic** - that means they believe that society is a system in which individuals achievements are based on their own talents and efforts rather than their social origins and backgrounds.

Some roles are functionally more important for society than others. For example, they provide essential services and ensure society's survival over time.

Most people lack the talent to fill these functionally important roles or the motivation to train for them. Only a minority of people will have the natural talent and the potential to fulfil the most functionally important role. To attract the most talented people, these roles must provide access to desirable rewards such as high pay and status. Davis and Moore argue that these functionally important positions must rank highly in the social scale. They must have status, a high salary and so on in order to attract the right people to fill them.

Stratification is functionally necessary for society because it ensures that the most talented people train for and fill the most important jobs.

All societies must treat people differently in terms of their status and rewards. So all societies must have some degree of inequality through stratification built into them. In David and Moore's view, social inequality is a means by which a society ensures that the most talented, trained and qualified people fill the most important positions. All societies must treat people differently in terms of their status. As a result, all societies must have some degree of inequality built into them.

#### Criticisms (AO3)

- Many jobs that are vital to society have relatively low pay (for example, nursing) or low status (for example, refuse collection)
- A group's high pay and status may be linked to its power rather than to the functional importance of its position.
- Davis and Moore assume that society is meritocratic but critics disagree. Rather than seeing stratification as functional, Marxists view it as a means by which a privileged minority exploit others. Neither inequality nor stratification is inevitable.



### 12 marker help:

In your 12 marker, you will definitely need to explain the views of Davis and Moore about how and why society has a system of stratification and why there is inequality. You will then need to compare this with other viewpoints on this, mainly Marxist and Feminists. I think it is likely that the question will be something like this:

Discuss how far sociologists would agree that Britain is a meritocratic society – this will mean that you have to first state whether Davis and Moore agree with this (they do!) and explain what a Marxist and Feminist would think about it (they don't agree that society is meritocratic). Or, it will ask you whether sociologists think that social stratification is necessary or functional – Davis and Moore think that stratification has a function and is necessary for society. Feminists and Marxists don't think it is functional and the way society is stratified puts some groups of people at a big disadvantage.

In the viewpoints below, I have put a section that says 'Link' – this is where I write whether the sociologists believe that society is meritocratic and whether they think stratification is necessary. You can use these as your link sentences in the 12 markers.

## Karl Marx and Marxists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- Marx identified two main classes in capitalist society: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.
- Marx believed that what determines what social class (strata) you belong to is ownership or non-ownership of the means of production.
- The wealthy Bourgeoisie own the means of production and the proletariat sell their labour to the Bourgeoisie in order to survive.
- The proletariat experience **alienation** under capitalism because they lack control over production and the products of their labour.
- Other classes include the lumpenproletariat (such as the 'drop-outs' and criminals of society) and the petty bourgeoisie (such as the owners of small businesses)
- The two main classes have opposing interests – The Bourgeoisie want ever-increasing profits and the proletariat seek higher wages. The bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat, leading to class conflict.
- The Bourgeoisie's position is justified by ruling-class ideology, for example, ideas about competition and the free market disguise the reality of exploitation. This ruling-class ideology leads to false class consciousness among the proletariat which means they are largely unaware that they are being exploited under capitalism.
- Marx argued that over time, the bourgeoisie would get smaller and much richer. The petty bourgeoisie, unable to compete, would sink into the proletariat. The proletariat would get bigger and increasingly poor. Eventually, the proletariat would rebel, leading to a revolution. Following this, the means of production would be communally owned, resulting in a classless society.
- Global capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



**LINK (AO2):** Marxists do not think that society in Britain is meritocratic, they think that people have different chances in life based on their social class background. They do not think that stratification is necessary or functional, they think that stratification has occurred through the exploitation of the proletariat which benefits the Bourgeoisie – it is not functional for the lower social classes and disadvantages them.

**Criticisms (AO3):** A social revolution has not occurred in Britain, partly as a result of increased standards of living and the development of the welfare state.

The development of a large middle-class and opportunities for social mobility challenge Marxist's approaches to the class structure. Feminists argue that Marx and Marxists focus on class at the expense of gender divisions in society, while others argue that they neglect ethnicity.

## Feminists



- Feminists focus on gender inequalities as a form of stratification in society. Over the last 50 years, anti-discrimination legislation (such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1975) has addressed aspects of gender inequality in education and employment.
- Despite this, feminist approaches argue that gender is still a key division in society. For example, the gender pay gap persists because women are more likely than men to work in low-paid and part-time jobs. Women are held back by a glass-ceiling which acts as an invisible barrier to promotion. Some occupations are either male-dominated or female-dominated. For example, although the proportion of female fire-fighters in England is increasing, it was only 3.9% in 2010.
- Explanations for the persistence in gender inequalities at work include sex discrimination in the workplace, women's triple shift (combining paid work, domestic labour and emotion work) and inadequate childcare provision.
- Some feminist approaches argue that society is patriarchal in that men have power within families, politics and the workplace and generally receive a bigger share of rewards such as income, wealth and status.

**LINK (AO2):** Feminists do not think that society is meritocratic like Davis and Moore because they believe that men are given greater opportunities. They do not think stratification is functional for society as they believe that gender inequalities as a form of stratification significantly disadvantage women in terms of their life chances and there is no reason that women cannot do the same jobs as a man can, for example.

**Criticisms (AO3):** Some sociologists argue that Feminists ignore how people can experience discrimination based on other factors such as age, ethnicity and race.



