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THIRD EDITION

Understanding Social Inequality

Intersections of Class, Age, Gender, Ethnicity, and Race in Canada

Julie McMullin
& Josh Curtis

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Preface

When I was five years old, I decided that I wanted to visit a friend who lived quite a distance away. When I asked my mother and father if I could go to Susan's house, they said no. When I asked why, they said, "Because we said so." At this point I became aware of the fact that I was young and that being young didn't seem fair. I remember this incident because when my parents couldn't give me a good reason for not visiting my friend, I decided to run away from home. Luckily, as I was hitchhiking down the street with my hand open wide (my version of the one-thumb-up pose), a friendly woman picked me up and told me she'd take me home. I couldn't remember where I lived, so the woman drove me up and down many streets until we found one that I recognized as my own.

When I was 16 years old, I worked as a waitress, but I was paid less per hour than my 18-year-old friend. This too seemed unfair.

When I was 8, my younger brothers and I were playing outside on a very hot day. My mother took off my brothers' shirts for relief from the heat. When I started to take off my shirt, my mother told me that girls must keep their shirts on. "Why?" I asked. "Because," she said. I couldn't understand this at all; my brothers and I looked the same. I thought to myself that being a girl wasn't fair.

When I went to university, I discovered I was a member of the working class. My professors told me that capitalists employed workers at relatively low wages to ensure high levels of profit for themselves. They told me about the social and cultural disadvantages of being from a working-class background. Gradually my university experience began to make some sense. I couldn't figure out why my grades were only average despite my considerable effort. Part of it was that I didn't know how to play the game—that is, how to ask my professors for help, how to use a big library, how to study effectively—and no one I knew could coach me. This seemed unfair.

It wasn't until I was in my late twenties that I discovered I was white. This awareness came as I was reading Patricia Hill Collins's book, *Black Feminist Thought* (1990). Of course, at some level I knew I was white, but I wasn't fully aware of the privileges associated with the colour of my skin until then. This too seemed unfair.

Structures of inequality in Canada are organized along age, class, gender, ethnic, and racial lines. The preceding stories, as trivial as they may seem, show some of the ways in which this occurs. They show that inequality involves power, the ability of individuals or groups to impose their will, with or without resistance, on others. They show that ideology is an important dimension of inequality; that societal beliefs about what is appropriate for people to do on the basis of their sex, class, race, or age create advantage for some and disadvantage for others. The stories show that inequality is about the distribution of material, cultural, and social resources. And they show that the meaning people attribute to sex, class, race, and age is shaped by experience. These are some of the complex issues that I will consider throughout this book.

Acknowledgments

As I wrote the first and second editions of this book, I often reflected upon my life as an academic and thought about how privileged I am. Part of what makes my life so privileged is that I am surrounded by wonderful colleagues, family, and friends to whom I owe much gratitude for the help and support that they have graciously given me. When I was having trouble when I first began to write this book, James Teevan, Michael Gardiner, Edward Grabb, Victor Marshall, and Ingrid Connidis read my proposal and provided me with valuable feedback. To Ed I am especially grateful because he suggested that I send my proposal to Megan Mueller, then acquisitions editor for Oxford University Press. Megan liked my proposal and pursued the book project with vigour. Although Megan persuaded me to write this manuscript much more like a textbook than I had originally intended, I thank her for her welcome and very positive encouragement along the way.

In writing the first edition of this book and in revising it for the second edition, I was fortunate to work with very talented research assistants. Thanks go to Katherine Pendakis and Erin Demaiter (first edition) and to Catherine Gordon, Jennifer Silcox, and Juyan Wang (second edition), who did literature and data searches, tracked down references, and combed the Internet for stories that could be used in the boxed inserts. I am particularly indebted to Tammy Duerden Comeau, who also worked as a research assistant on both editions of the book. Tammy saved my sanity by agreeing to co-author chapters 10, 11, and 12 with me for the first edition and helped me revise them for the second. Finally, Emily Jovic deserves a very special thank you for her work on the second edition of this book. Emily's industry and resourcefulness helped to make this book what it is, and I will be forever grateful for her help.

For this third edition of the book, I took on a co-author, Josh Curtis. Josh worked on updating the data, included a new cross-national perspective, and added his own voice to the book through the new boxed inserts that appear here. Thank you, Josh.

Parts of this book have been adapted from some of my previously published work. Chapter 5 is a revised version of my article "Diversity and the State of Sociological Aging Theory," which appeared in volume 40 of the *Gerontologist*, and bits of chapter 9 were taken from "Social Class and Inequality," which appeared as chapter 14 in *Sociology: A Canadian Perspective*, edited by Lorne Tepperman and Jim Curtis and published by Oxford University Press.

As I was writing this book and working on both of its subsequent editions, Ingrid Connidis, Lorraine Davies, and I shared many moments of joy, sadness, anger, and frustration owing to both our work and our personal lives. It is impossible to imagine my life without having Ingrid and Lorraine to celebrate the good times with and to lean on when the times are tough. What an honour it is to have them as friends, collaborators, and colleagues.

I am very fortunate to have a wonderful family. My brothers, my sisters-in-law, my father-in-law, my nieces and nephews all serve as important diversions from my work. Emma and Scott are the loves of my life, and without them my work, and this book, would be for naught. Thank you both.

— Julie McMullin

I am grateful to Julie McMullin for the opportunity to collaborate with her on the third edition of this book. Although Julie might not know this, collaborating with her has been on my mind since I decided to become a sociologist. Before pursuing graduate studies at the University of Toronto, I made a phone call to Ed Grabb—a long-time family friend—to ask his advice about mentors, sociology departments, and universities in Canada. Knowing that I was keen to pursue research in social inequality and political sociology, he immediately mentioned Julie (along with several other important Canadian researchers, including Bob Andersen, John Myles, Lorne Tepperman, Bob Brym, Harvey Krahn, Neil Guppy, and Doug Baer, all of whom have influenced my research along the way). After weeks of deliberation, lost sleep, and of course more phone calls to Ed, I decided that Toronto would be the best fit.

Having taken Ed's advice to heart, over the next several years I followed the research of every Canadian sociologist he mentioned. When I finished my dissertation and the opportunity to study at Western with Julie presented itself, the decision was an easy one. I have enjoyed talking and writing about inequality in Canada with Julie. I am honoured to co-author this textbook with her, and I look forward to many more years of research and collaboration. Thank you, Julie!

— Josh Curtis

PART I

The first objective of Part I is to discuss and assess theories of class, age, gender, ethnicity, and "race" that have been used to explain inequality. Of course, it would be impossible to discuss all of the theories; instead, the first part of this book considers theories that have made influential contributions to our understanding of class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race in relation to inequality, especially in Canada. Further, theories that consider the structural nature of these factors are prioritized. However, because structures do not exist outside of the individual interaction that creates them, some symbolic-interactionist perspectives are discussed. In particular, some very good work has been done on gender and race from a symbolic-interactionist perspective, and it would be remiss to ignore it.

The second objective of Part I is to examine human agency and its relationship to social structure and human agency. Although most of the work on social inequality is at the macro, structural level, sociologists recognize that for social life to be better understood, assessments of the intersection between individual agency and social structures are required. However, there is very little agreement regarding the specific relationship between agency and structure.

The third objective of Part I is to integrate ideas from the various perspectives on class, age, gender, ethnicity, race, and human agency into a cohesive conceptual framework. The aim of this exercise is to provide an organizational tool that will enable us to explore social inequality without giving a priori emphasis to any of class, age, gender, ethnicity, or race. In doing so, we will be able to examine how structures of inequality are produced and reproduced through human agency and interaction.

1

Introduction

This is a book about social inequality, and it begins by describing the life of a woman I (McMullin) know. Anna was born to white, English-speaking parents of British descent in 1915, just after the First World War began. She grew up on a farm in Ontario with her mother, father, and two brothers. Although it was only a small farm, Anna's father and mother worked hard and were able to provide their family with the essentials of life. Anna graduated from high school, which was unusual for a rural girl in that day, and although she had the opportunity to go on to teachers' college, as her mother had done, she decided to marry John Warner, a local man who was seven years her senior. She married well. John's family members were well-to-do small-business owners, and with their help, Anna and John began their marriage in the late 1930s in relative financial stability. They moved to town and had two daughters, one in 1941 and the other in 1943.

Anna was always a homemaker, and John never had a stable job. His older brother, who was married and childless, inherited their father's business and John worked for him occasionally. John also bought houses, restored them, and sold them for a profit. Money was tight in the Warner household, but no one seemed to want for anything. There was food on the table, they had paid for the house in full when they bought it, and they had a few good clothes.

In 1970, John died suddenly in a car accident. He was 62 and Anna was 55. John's estate consisted of some savings and his house. His will stipulated that Anna could draw $200 per month from his estate until she either remarried or died, at which time the estate would be divided equally among her daughters. Suddenly, Anna was poor. Her income was well below the qualifying cut-off for social assistance, but she refused to apply for it and was too young for the old age pension. The will stipulated that she could not sell John's house. Aside from a brief stint in business college, Anna had no training, no work experience, and no marketable skills. Besides, at 55 she was unlikely to find work. Her daughter hired her to babysit her grandchildren, and for the next 10 years she made do with the clothes she already owned, shopping at yard sales, and eating anything that she could buy for next to nothing in the grocery store—old bread, dinted canned food, and so on. After 10 years Anna turned 65 and began receiving Old Age Security. Though

she was still poor, she was no longer destitute. Five years later her sister-in-law, the widow of John's childless brother who had inherited the family business, died, leaving Anna one-third of her quite large estate. Suddenly, at age 70, Anna was better off financially than she had ever been before.

Throughout most of Anna's life she lived in a house with sturdy walls, running water, hot water, a toilet, and electricity, and she had enough food and nutrition. She never directly experienced a war fought on Canadian soil, genocide, or acts of terrorism. Anna lived in a country where human rights were respected, public gatherings were permitted, and things like freedom of speech and moving across borders were taken for granted. During her life she saw the birth of universal health care and took advantage of elementary and high school education that was provided without cost to all children.

Although this book is primarily about social inequality in Canada, it is important to recognize Canada's relative wealth and advantage compared with other countries of the world. Anna's life, while disadvantaged in some ways within the context of Canada, was privileged in many other ways because she was lucky enough to be born in one of the most prosperous countries in the world. In this edition of *Understanding Social Inequality*, we explore Canada's advantage in this regard by situating it in relation to other countries, such as Rwanda and China. We do this primarily through discussions in boxed inserts that describe what it is like to live in countries where the necessities of life and liberty are not taken for granted. In these boxes, we also situate the Canadian experience in relation to experience in other privileged European countries and the United States.

A central aim of this book is to develop a conceptual framework that will help explain the ebb and flow of poverty that Anna experienced throughout her life. We often think of the conditions of inequality, such as poverty or homelessness (see Box 1.1), as inescapable fixed states, and indeed there is ample evidence that for many this is true (see 1.5 million people experiencing persistent poverty in Box. 1.2). However, the description of Anna's life demonstrates that, for others, experiences of inequality may be more complex, involving multiple transitions in and out of relative states of deprivation (see Cooke 2005; L. Davies, McMullin, and Avison 2001; Leisering and Leibfried 1999). And for those who live outside of Canada, poverty can sometimes be extreme (see Box 1.3).

As Box 1.2 shows, 7.6 million Canadians experienced poverty for at least one year between 1997 and 2001. Yet, in any given year, that number is lower. To understand inequality in this way requires a definition that considers durable patterns of advantage and disadvantage, the capacity of individuals to act toward change, and time. Unfortunately, the data in Box 1.2 comes from the previous edition of this book and could not be easily updated with current Canadian statistics. This is because Canada has witnessed profound cuts to social research under the Harper government. Programs such as the Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) and the National Council of Welfare (1969–2012), which served as an advisory group to the federal minister responsible for the welfare of Canadians, lost federal funding in 2012 (only requiring $1 million per year to operate). Statistics Canada's mandatory long-form census survey was also abolished for the 2011 Canadian Census. This has led to the underrepresentation of data on First Nations people, new immigrants, and lower-income Canadians. These budget cuts were puzzling given other national trends in data collection—most other governments celebrate such data collection, understanding that smart social planning needs robust data and analytics. This

HIGHLIGHT

Box 1.1 Measuring Poverty

Low income cut-offs (LICOs)—more commonly known as Canada's "unofficial" poverty lines—are established by Statistics Canada using data from the Family Expenditure Survey (now known as the Survey of Household Spending). Measures of low income were first introduced in Canada in 1968 based on family expenditure patterns. Overall, Canadian trends indicated that families spent nearly 50 per cent of their total income on food, shelter, and clothing. Currently, and somewhat arbitrarily, it is commonly believed that if families spend 70 per cent or more of their income (i.e., 20 per cent above the national average 50 per cent) on these basic necessities of life they would be living in "strained circumstances." LICOs indicate the level of income at which a family may be living in economic hardship because it spends a greater proportion of its income on the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing than does the average family of a similar size.

As the table below shows, separate cut-offs are determined for seven sizes of family—from unattached individuals to families of seven or more persons—and for five sizes of communities—from rural areas (a one-person LICO cut-off is $16,038) to urban areas with a population of 500,000+ (a one-person LICO cut-off is $23,298).

Statistics Canada does not refer to the LICOs as poverty lines, although it concedes that LICOs identify "those who are substantially worse off than the average." And, in the absence of official poverty lines, many analysts use LICOs to study the economic security of Canadian families and to report on important trends over time.

Statistics Canada's After-Tax Low-Income Cut-offs (1992 Base) for 2011

	Community Size				
	Rural areas outside CMA or CA[1]	Census Agglomeration (CA)		Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)	
Size of Family Unit		Less than 30,000 inhabitants[2]	30,000 to 99,999 inhabitants	100,000 to 499,999 inhabitants	500,000 inhabitants or more
	Current Dollars **2011**				
1 person	16,038	18,246	19,941	20,065	23,298
2 persons	19,966	22,714	24,824	24,978	29,004
3 persons	24,545	27,924	30,517	30,707	35,657
4 persons	29,802	33,905	37,053	37,283	43,292
5 persons	33,800	38,454	42,025	42,285	49,102
6 persons	38,122	43,370	47,398	47,692	55,378
7 or more persons	42,443	48,285	52,770	53,097	61,656

1. Can include some small population centres.
2. Includes population centres with less than 10,000 inhabitants.

Source: Statistics Canada (2013). Income Research Paper Series (75F0002M). www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/2012002/tbl/tbl02-eng.htm

HIGHLIGHT

Box 1.2 Persistence of Poverty

Many people and families move in and out of poverty. Some stay in poverty for only a short period of time while others experience deep and persistent poverty. For children, chronic poverty has a significant effect on both their short-term and long-term developmental outcomes.

Approximately 7.6 million people or 30.7 per cent of the population experienced poverty for at least one year from 1996 through 2001.

Just over 2 million people lived in poverty for only one year. Nearly 1.5 million people lived in poverty for all six years.

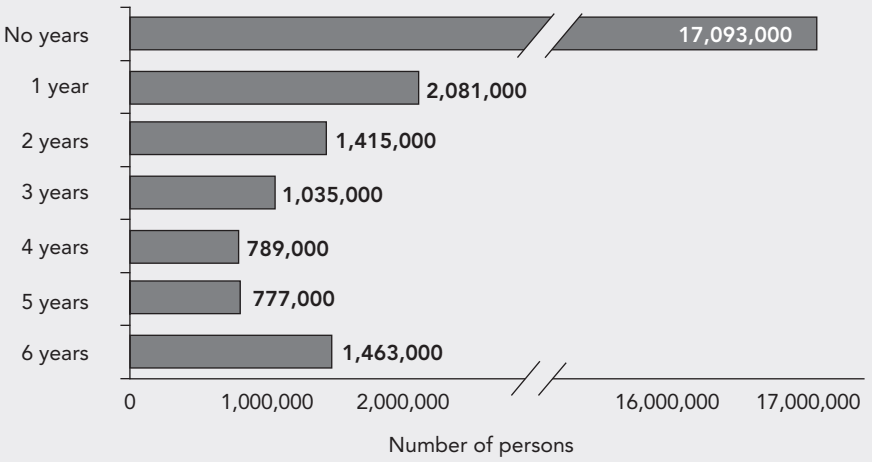
Persistent Poverty

Almost 400,000 children lived in poverty for all six years between 1996 and 2001.

About 13 per cent of people with less than a high school education lived in poverty for all six years. Less than 2 per cent of people with university degrees lived in poverty for all six years.

Transitions in and out of Poverty

The one age group that stands apart is youth aged 18 through 24. This group has a high poverty rate in any given year but often tends to be poor for only one or two years at a time. They have the highest rate of moving into or out of poverty, almost double that of people aged 25 to 54.



Number of Years in Poverty[a]

[a] Excludes persons whose status was not known in each of the six years.

Source: National Council of Welfare (2006a).

Global perspectives

Box 1.3 The World Bank Initiative for Reducing Global Poverty

The World Bank Group (WBG) was created in 1944 and was intended to help rebuild post–Second World War Europe. Since then it has grown into an international organization with the core goal being to reduce global poverty and inequality. To do this, the WBG offers zero- to low-interest loans so that middle-income and low-income countries can invest in areas such as education, health care, national infrastructure, the environment, and public and private sector development. Today, the WBG works closely with nearly 145 countries around the world to lessen poverty and to invest in and grow their economies. The World Bank Group's lending commitments have sharply increased in recent decades. For example, in 1981 $12.29 billion was invested in poverty-reducing initiatives around the world. Today, however, this group has invested in 12,414 projects around the world, and in 2015 alone $42.49 billion was loaned to countries in need.

The State of Global Poverty

Although groups like the World Bank are more common today than they were in the past, levels of global poverty are still very high. For example, in the developing world almost 17 per cent—or 1.91 billion—of people lived on less than $1.25 per day in 2011 (World Bank 2015). While this number has dropped from 1.93 billion people in 1981, it has been only a modest decline. According to GRID-Arendal, a research institute concerned with poverty and the environment, at the global level poverty has fallen from 52 per cent in 1981 to only about 26 per cent in 2005. However, as the map opposite shows, there are noticeable regional differences today. For example, poverty in sub-Saharan Africa has remained around 50 per cent since the 1980s, making it one of the most economically unequal countries today. East Asia, however, has seen a noticeable

was the first instance of many where sources from which data could be drawn in earlier book editions were eliminated. Fortunately, when the Trudeau-led Liberal government was elected in 2015, the mandatory long-form census was restored.

The nature and character of poverty are different depending on where in the world one lives. As Box 1.3 shows, in 2011 over 1 billion people in the world lived on less than $1.25 per day. Although the percentage of people who live in poverty has declined considerably, the World Bank's dream to eliminate poverty remains elusive, particularly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Defining Social Inequality

Sociologists argue that innate personality flaws do not cause inequality. People are not poor because they are lazy or because they lack motivation, ambition, or intellect. They are poor because opportunities are distributed differentially in society on the basis of things such as class, age, gender, ethnicity, and "race." Sociologists are interested in why social inequality exists, what factors contribute to social inequality, how and through which processes it is maintained, and what changes need to be made to create a more equal society. A unifying assumption in much of the contemporary sociological work on social

reduction in poverty. In 1981, 80 per cent of people living in East Asia lived in poverty, but the figure dropped to only 7.2 per cent in 2012 (www.worldbank.org). To provide more context about poverty and income inequality around the world, we turn to the following map, which graphically classifies countries by gross national income (GNI) per capita.

Global Poverty Map

Source: Hugo Ahlenius, UNEP/GRID-Arendal, data from: World Bank. 2008. World Bank list of economies (country classification). http://go.worldbank.org/K2CKM78CC0.

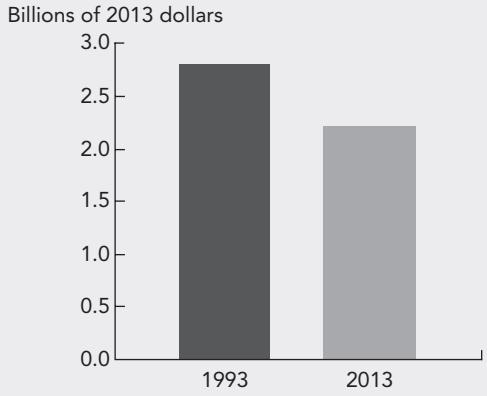
inequality is that it is a social problem. Few sociologists would argue that we need higher rates of poverty; more hungry, malnourished people in the world; or more disparity in wealth and power between the rich and the poor. Indeed, many sociologists search for ways in which problems of inequality can be alleviated, and in doing so, they specify policies and programs that would help to eradicate it. This line of inquiry is as old as the discipline itself, for Karl Marx and Max Weber both considered these important issues (see Grabb 2007 for a detailed account).

At a very basic level, inequality is a condition or situation that is not equal. This suggests that *inequality* does not simply refer to differences among individuals but rather reflects differences that matter, differences that result in unfairness and disadvantage for some and privilege for others. In Canada, class, age, gender, race, and ethnicity are differences that matter; hair colour or texture do not. **Social inequality**, as it is usually defined, refers to relatively long-lasting differences among individuals or groups of people that have implications for individual lives, especially "for the rights or opportunities they exercise and the rewards or privileges they enjoy" (Grabb 2007: 1; see also Pampel 1998). So, for example, compared with people from the middle and upper classes, people who are a part of the working class do not have the same educational opportunities and tend to have worse health. Women and members of racial

HIGHLIGHT

Box 1.4 The State of Canadian Homelessness

Homelessness emerged as a social problem—even a crisis—in Canada during the 1990s. Communities across Canada have struggled to respond as rates of homelessness have steadily risen. Declining wages (a minimum wage that has not kept pace with inflation), reduced benefits (weak pension and social assistance programs), and a dwindling supply of affordable housing have placed increasing numbers of Canadians at risk. According to 2014 research from the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH), a large responsibility for this problem rests on the federal government and its lack of investment in affordable housing. As the figure to the right shows, from 1993 to 2013 social housing spending and support dropped to $2.054 billion from $2.8 billion. In terms of GDP per capita, the amount of spending has declined from $115 per person in 1989 to about $60 per person in 2013.



Federal Government Spending on Affordable Housing, 1993 and 2013

Source: Gaetz et al. (2014).

and ethnic-minority groups tend to work in bad jobs, while good jobs are reserved for men and members of privileged racial and ethnic groups. And, compared with middle-aged adults, older and younger people suffer longer bouts of unemployment and earn less money. In these examples, class, gender, race, ethnicity, and age are social structures of inequality that result in outcomes that matter. These **structures of inequality** are patterns of advantage and disadvantage that are durable (Tilly 1998) but penetrable.

At an individual level, the experience of inequality refers to the meaning that is attached to unequal life conditions as well as to the things that people do to manage or penetrate the structures of inequality. These issues reflect human agency or the capacity of individuals to interpret their situation and act to change it. However, the experience of inequality is at odds with the experience of privilege by which those in positions of power act to maintain their advantage and reproduce the structures of inequality (see Box 1.4). Furthermore, the experience of inequality must be examined within the context of social time. For our purposes, *social time* refers to issues of generation and the life course. The experience of inequality in this context is understood as a dynamic process that evolves throughout one's life and is influenced by the generation in which one is born.

In short, the perspective developed in this book suggests that to understand social inequality we need a framework that integrates social structure, human agency, and social time. Hence it is important to define each of these terms carefully and to discuss the assumptions made about them in this book.

In 2013, government spending to counterbalance homelessness was in the billions, yet

- 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness in any given year;
- 150,000 Canadians a year use a homeless shelter at some point;
- 50,000 Canadians are part of the "hidden homeless" each night—staying with friends or relatives on a temporary basis.

Ending Homelessness in Canada

In *The State of Homelessness in Canada*, Gaetz et al. (2014) argue that the Canadian government must target three areas in order to help reduce the homelessness crisis in Canada:

- **Eliminate chronic homelessness in Canada**. More than 20,000 chronically and episodically homeless Canadians will obtain and maintain housing with necessary supports.
- **Shorten the average time people experience homelessness to less than two weeks**. Our emergency services will no longer provide long-term housing but will return to their original mandate—to help people through a short-term crisis. Homelessness in Canada will become a rare, brief, and one-time experience.
- **Bring all three levels of government—as well as Aboriginal governments—to the table to support local plans to end homelessness**, develop coordinated local homelessness systems of care, and ensure that housing investment matches unique local priorities and support (Gaetz et al. 2014: 9).

Source: Gaetz et al. (2014).

Defining Social Structure

If we acknowledge the assumptions that sociologists make about social structures in their work, we can understand better why certain research questions are asked in the first place and we can interpret research in context. **Social structure** generally refers to relatively long-lasting patterned relationships among the elements of society (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 2000). Although this broad definition holds true regardless of one's sociological perspective, there is little agreement in sociology about what precisely social structures are and even less agreement about their relationship to individuals. In general, however, there are two dominant views of social structure; one has its intellectual roots in structural functionalism, the other in **critical theory**.

Following the work of Talcott Parsons, structural functionalists conceive of society as an all-encompassing social structure that may be decomposed into several specialized substructures. Examples of these substructures are the economic, the political, and the educational systems of society. From this point of view, the elements of social structures include social institutions (e.g., work organizations and political institutions) and patterns of social roles (Parsons 1951). Roles are the building blocks of institutions, and institutions are, in turn, the building blocks of society (Parsons 1951; Riley 1971). Structural functionalists tend to overemphasize the degree to which individuals conform to the values and norms established in the social structure and the degree to which society is based on consensus (Layder 1994). Furthermore,

structural functionalism de-emphasizes the possibility of conflict in society or the possibility that individual choices are constrained by the forces of social structures.

Stratification approaches to the study of inequality tend to make assumptions about social structures that are in line with structural-functionalist thought (see Grabb 2007: 98–102). According to stratification theory, individuals can be ranked hierarchically according to socially desirable characteristics such as income, education, occupation, status, or prestige. This hierarchical procedure groups individuals together in discrete categories or social strata (J.H. Turner 1988). Because social structures are thought to comprise patterns of social roles that are acted out by individuals, much of this work focuses on the characteristics of individuals rather than on relationships among people. This led Tilly (1998: 34) to suggest, "Instead of reducing social behaviour to individual decision-making, social scientists urgently need to study the relational constraints within which all individual action takes place." The idea of "relational constraints" points to the importance of adopting a more critical view of social structures when studying inequality.

Critical approaches to studies of inequality and social structures are sometimes informed by Marxist sociology; they assume that social relations, especially class relations, are the fundamental elements of the social structure. Of course there are many definitions of *social class*, the details of which will be discussed in chapter 2. Put simply, however, *class relations* refer to the relative rights and powers that people have in production processes (Wright 1997). The structural significance of class relations is the manner in which they produce durable and patterned systems of inequality; central to this process is the conflict embedded in class relations. According to these approaches, inequality results largely from class structures, and thus explanations of inequality are reduced to issues of economic subordination. Yet, to understand inequality better, the structures of age, gender, ethnicity, and race must also be considered.

Structures of Inequality

In studies of inequality, scholars make different assumptions about which social structures are important. Some emphasize class, social gerontologists focus on age, feminist researchers concentrate on gender relations, and still others consider race or ethnic relations as the central element of social inequality. This is not to say that there has been no overlap. Many have considered at least two of these dimensions, but few have examined each of them in relation to the others. This book begins with the assumption that researchers should consider all of these factors and that neglecting one or more of them may distort descriptions and explanations of social inequality. Consider, for example, the following discussion of age, social inequality, and social policy.

The importance of age relations in the analysis of social inequality is crucial, particularly in light of population aging. The fact that Canada's population is aging is well known. At the beginning of this century, 5 per cent of the Canadian population was aged 65 and over; by 2014, this had more than doubled, to 17.3 per cent (www.ciaworldfactbook.com). Beaujot, McQuillan, and Ravanera (2007) predict that by 2051 the proportion of the population aged 65 and over will be 26.4 per cent. The proportion of the population aged 75 and over is growing even faster. By 2051 it is expected to reach 14.7 per cent, more than double the 2006 figure of 6.3 per cent (Beaujot, McQuillan, and Ravanera 2007). Although demographic predictions about the aging of the population vary depending on the assumptions made about future immigration, mortality rates, and fertility rates, most people agree that, barring disaster or unforeseen circumstances, the trend is real and significant.

The economic strain that an aging population may impose on Canada cannot be ignored. However, the crisis ideology that often frames political and media discussions of this topic serves to create a sense of urgency about Canada's financial problems while downplaying the economic needs of disadvantaged people. Thus, the emphasis is placed on Canada's fiscal well-being rather than on that of the over 3 million Canadians who are poor (Citizens for Public Justice 2012).

These discussions also create an environment of competition over the distribution of limited resources between younger and older adults. Although debates over generational equity have been slow to evolve in Canada (V.W. Marshall, Cook, and J.G. Marshall 1993), with health care and pension reform at the anterior of the political agenda, politicians started to make proposals in the 1990s that fuelled such debates. For instance, in 1994 Lloyd Axworthy, then human resources minister of Canada, suggested that a portion of the money spent on Old Age Security should be redirected toward job retraining for young working-aged people (*Globe and Mail*, 9 March 1994, cited in Myles and Street 1995). Indeed, poverty is an important issue among the working population. Figure 1.1 shows how income inequality has risen for single working-aged working adults from 1981 to 2011. In 2011, about 40 per cent of people under 65 were living below the LICO compared with only 19 per cent in 1981. As Figure 1.2 shows, the poverty rate for lone-parent families is drastically higher than for couples with no children and two-parent families with children. Yet one might ask why these monies could not also be redirected toward older people who are economically disadvantaged.

Part of the problem with policy directives like the ones mentioned above is that the population is categorized into the old and the young without taking gender, class, race, ethnicity, or further age distinctions into account. Close examinations of poverty rates do not support the simple bifurcation of the population according to age. For instance, in 2010 there were 2,114,950 men (about 8.4 per cent) and 2,224,030 women (about 8.5 per cent) between 55 and 64 living in poverty (almost 5 per cent more women than men). This gender difference was more pronounced among those aged 75 and over, for whom the poverty rate for women was almost 25 per cent higher (Statistics Canada 2011a). Being a single parent also differentially affects the poverty rate for men and women. In 2010, there were 2,834,695 women and 646,335 men lone parents living under the poverty line (about 23 per cent more likely for women) (Statistics Canada 2011).

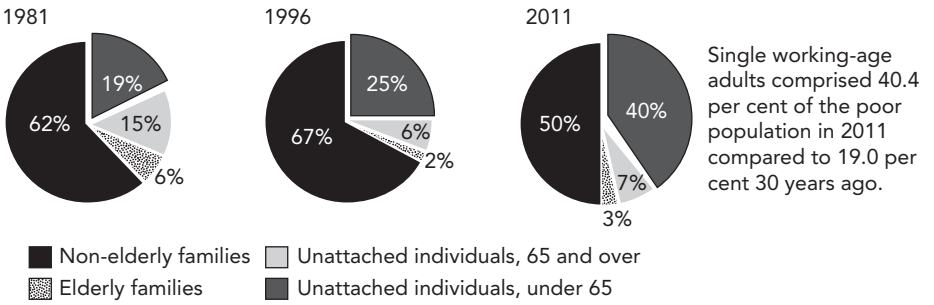


Figure 1.1 Percentage Distribution of Poor Households, 1981–2011

Source: Citizens for Public Justice, *Poverty Trends Highlights, Canada 2013* (Ottawa: CPJ), 4. Statistics Canada, Table 202-0804. Persons in low income, by economic family type, annual.

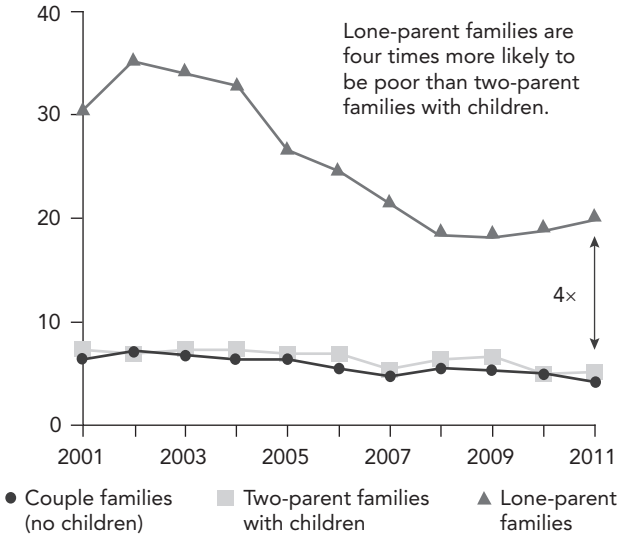


Figure 1.2 Poverty Rate among Working-Age Families, by Type, 2001–2011

Source: Citizens for Public Justice, *Poverty Trends Highlights, Canada 2013* (Ottawa: CPJ). Statistics Canada, Table 202-0804. Persons in low income, by economic family type, annual.

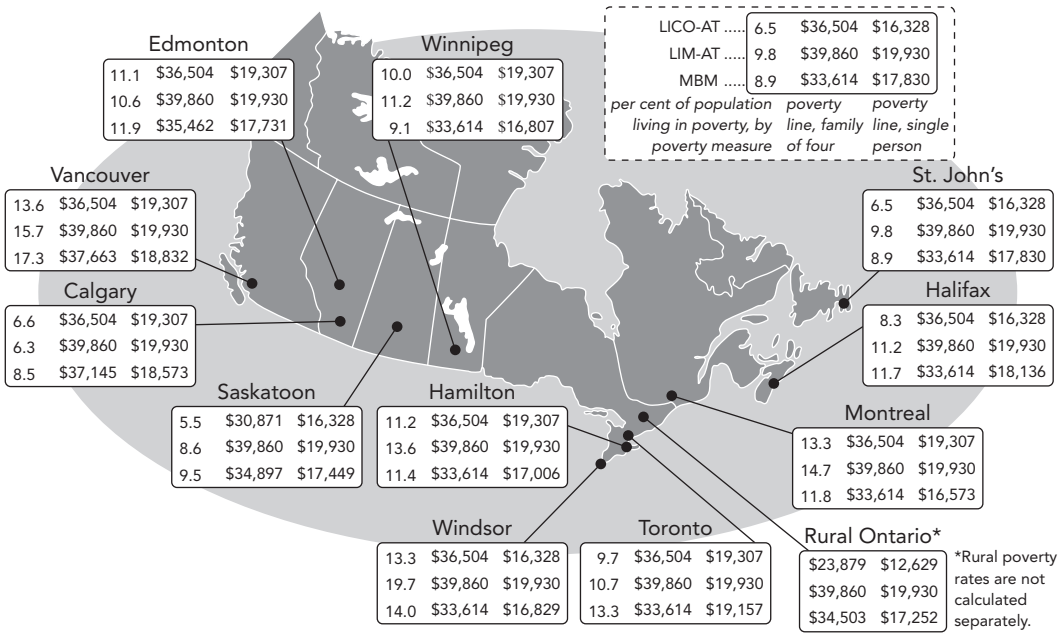
Poverty rates vary by occupation (which is often used as a measure of social class) among those under age 65. Persons employed in managerial and professional occupations have lower poverties rates than those employed in service industries (Statistics Canada 2011). Poverty rates also vary considerably across Canada. Map 1.1 displays three measures of poverty: the **low income cut-off** (LICO)—the level at which a family spends 63.9 per cent or more of its income on food, shelter, and clothing—the **low-income measure** (LIM)—a relative measure of low income that is set at 50 per cent of the adjusted mean household income—and the **market-based measure** (MBM)—an absolute measure of poverty that shows the level at which a household does not have the necessary income to purchase goods or essential services. Indeed, we must keep in mind that the "average" Canadian who falls below these cut-off points lives 33 per cent below these income thresholds. This means, for example, that the average single person below the LICO in Toronto earns only $6,371.31 per year. It is important to keep in mind that full-time workers who earn minimum wage (e.g., $10.25 in Ontario in 2011) fall $1,361 below the poverty line each month.

These figures provide useful information about economic inequality in Canada, but they are limiting because they do not take more than two factors into account at the same time. This narrow type of analysis, which is typical of the analyses conducted by governments, is thus also somewhat misleading. One of the key assumptions that the analysis in this book makes clear is that class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race must each be considered in studies of inequality. Scholars have attempted to integrate two or three of these factors with varying success. The challenge here is to give equal theoretical weight to each of these factors in order to understand social inequality. To do this we will argue that a framework must evolve that considers at least three interconnected processes of social life: production, reproduction,

Remember that the average poor household in Canada relies on an income that is 33 per cent below the poverty line.

Low income measures only capture material dimensions of poverty; poverty also manifests itself in other ways including social exclusion, diminished well-being, and stress.

Poverty rates and lines in select communities in Canada, 2011



Example:

Susan works 25 hours a week at a grocery store in Ontario. She earns minimum wage ($10.25/hr) and receives no benefits. Her net monthly income after deductions is $1,008, putting her well below the poverty line.

Wage: $10.25/hr

Net income: $1,008/mo

Poverty line: $1,361/mo

Gap: $353/mo

Map 1.1 Provincial Variation in LICO, LIM, and MBM Measures in 2011

Source: Citizens for Public Justice (2013). Statistics Canada, Table 202-0804. Persons in low income, by economic family type, annual.

and distribution—processes that are central to the survival of individuals and societies. In chapter 2, we define these processes, and in chapter 7, we elaborate upon how they are structured by the power relations that are assumed to exist among class, age, gender, and ethnic and race relations.

Class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race are conceptualized here as sets of **social relations** that are characterized by power and that are fundamental structures or organizing features of social life (Calasanti 1996; Calasanti and Slevin 2006). Power relations, which are essential to Weberian approaches to inequality,

are determined by the ability of individuals in social relationships to impose their will on others regardless of resistance (Weber [1922] 1978). Conceptualizing class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race as social relations characterized by power suggests that conflict is present more often than consensus in these sets of relations (McMullin and Marshall 1999: 308–9). Indeed, a relational understanding of class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race requires an emphasis on "structured forms of power, organization, direction, and regulation that exist in modern societies and through which ruling groups maintain and reproduce their dominant positions" (Layder 1994: 159; see also D.E. Smith 1987). These structured forms of power are established and reproduced through daily experiences as individuals and groups interact with one another (Grabb 2007; McMullin 2000; D.E. Smith 1987).

These views of social structures and power fall more in line with critical approaches to social inequality than with those found in stratification theory or structural-functionalist approaches. It is generally assumed that social relations are composed of social structures and that conflict and power are fundamental characteristics of these relations. This does not mean that social relationships are in a state of constant conflict or that people engage in daily power struggles. It does suggest, however, that the possibility of conflict and power struggles in these relations is omnipresent. In chapters 2 to 5, we expand on these ideas by providing an overview of the principal theories of social class, gender, race and ethnicity, and age.

Chapter 2 considers sociological debates about the conceptualization of social class. It begins with a discussion of Karl Marx's and Max Weber's theories of social class. It then considers the elaboration and extension of these classics by leading neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian thinkers and briefly discusses stratification approaches to social class. Chapter 2 concludes with a working definition of *social class* that will be used in this book.

Chapter 3 explores the relationship between gender and social inequality. It discusses various feminist approaches to social inequality, including radical feminism and socialist feminism. In particular, this chapter considers how the combination of patriarchy and capitalism leads to gender inequality. The chapter moves on to examine the pervasiveness of gender inequality in daily life; it concludes with a discussion of the approach to gender that will be used in this book.

Chapter 4 examines conceptualizations of race and ethnicity in relation to inequality. Beginning with the contentious debate about whether the term *race* should be used at all, chapter 4 outlines and contrasts various points of view about this issue. It considers the relationship between the concepts of race and ethnicity, although the emphasis is more on the former than the latter. The chapter also examines some theoretical work that has considered the experience of everyday racism. It concludes with a discussion of how race and ethnicity will be conceptualized in this book.

Chapter 5 considers various approaches to the study of age relations and the conceptualization and social construction of age. This chapter discusses how age is a structure of inequality in society and considers the stratification approaches and political economy approaches to age relations in this regard. Chapter 5 concludes with a working definition of *age relations* that will be used in the conceptual framework presented in chapter 7.

Human Agency: Connecting Individuals to Social Structures

Too often, research and theory on inequality concentrate either on structure or on individuals rather than combining the two. The

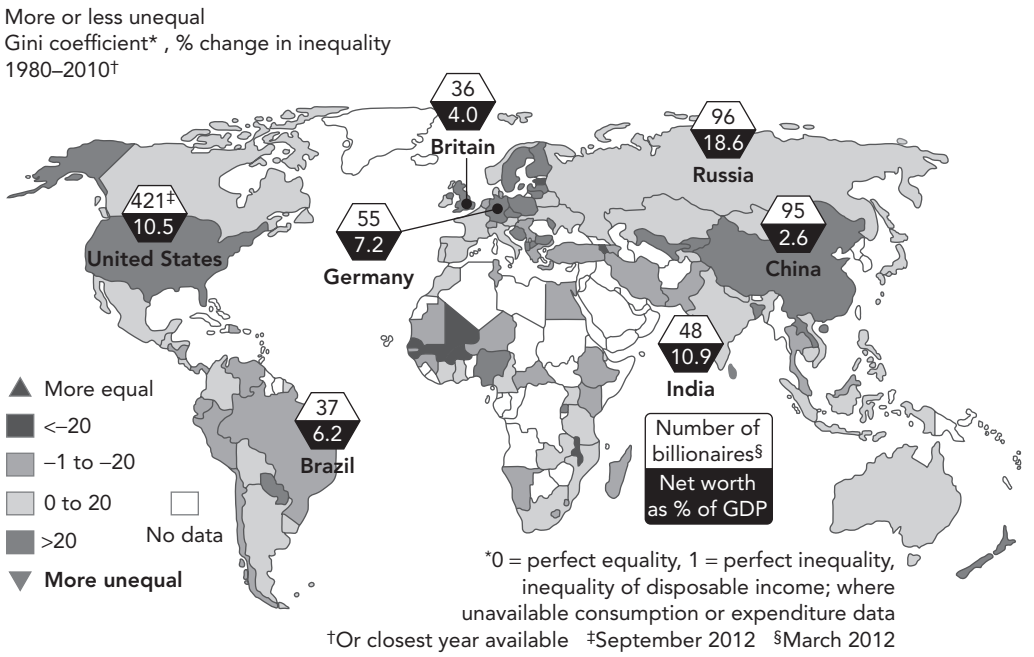
framework in this book highlights the importance of agency and its relationship with social structures. *Agency* expresses the idea that individuals do not passively conform to the circumstances of their lives. Rather, they are active participants in social relationships. They sometimes rebel and sometimes choose to follow the crowd, and so on. In this regard, we make two related assumptions about social life. First, "social structures do not stand outside of the human, social behaviour that produces them, yet, they nevertheless take on properties that transcend the behaviour of those who construct it"; and second, "while these properties of durability constrain and limit the agency of the individual they never do so completely" (McMullin and Marshall 2001: 114). In this light, although we assume that analyses of social inequality cannot be reduced to issues of individual motivation, ambition, and the like, individuals nonetheless make choices and decisions that influence their lot in life.

In chapter 6, we discuss how actors are conceptualized in this book by drawing on key works in several different theoretical traditions. In particular, we argue that we need to clarify and specify what is meant by *structuration theory* (Giddens 1984) by focusing on how individuals and structures are connected to one another. Thus, we place emphasis on how individuals negotiate real social structures, the mechanisms through which they do so, the constraints placed on individual negotiation by social structures, and how social structures gradually change or are reproduced through individual negotiations.

Lives in Time and Place

As noted above, *social time* refers to life course and generation issues. The life-course perspective allows us to examine how individuals manage social change and how past experiences affect their ability to cope. It also considers transitions and trajectories involving school, work, parenthood, retraining, job exit and re-entry, and retirement, as well as the timing of these, all of which influence inequality. *Generation* refers to the idea that people are born into groups that have meaningful significance because of the social-political culture of a given time in a given place. For instance, individuals who were born between 1910 and 1915 were coming of age during the Depression and their lives have been similarly shaped by that experience. But the effects of the Depression were experienced differently in farming communities in southern Ontario than they were in Vancouver, Montreal, or Toronto.

Although theories of social inequality have been slow to recognize the importance of spatial inequality (Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 2007; Tickamyer 2000), patterns of social inequality clearly vary regionally in Canada. Higher rates of low income are found in the Maritime provinces, in northern Ontario, and in central Saskatchewan than is true in most of southern Ontario and much of Alberta. Inequality also varies drastically around the world. Map 1.2 shows comparative data on income inequality as well as the number of billionaires and their net worth as a percentage of their countries' GDP. As shown, the United States and China are among the most unequal and have the most billionaires whose salaries occupy the highest GDP percentage in their country. Europeans tend to be the most egalitarian and believe that a fair society should have few income gaps between occupations. The United States and China support equality of opportunity: as long as people can move up the class ladder, income gaps are seen as fair and just. This wide variation in inequality also results from structural and political factors that will be discussed throughout this book. For now, suffice it to say that where one is born and where one subsequently lives influences life chances and the likelihood of experiencing outcomes of social inequality.



Map 1.2 Cross-National Differences in Income Inequality, 2010

Source: *The Economist*, www.economist.com/node/21564414

In chapter 7, we discuss the life-course perspective and the concept of generations and integrate these perspectives into a conceptual framework of inequality that also considers the intersections between agency and structure. We revisit Anna's life and show how the conceptual framework developed in Part I of this book is a useful tool in explaining the ebbs and flows of social inequality she experienced.

The second part of this book considers empirical research on social inequality in various domains. In sociological research, studies of social inequality often consider the gap in earnings, income, and assets between advantaged and disadvantaged groups of people (Albrecht 2007; L. Casper, McLanahan, and Garfinkel 1994; Grabb 2007; Langton and Pfeffer 1994; Martin and Robinson, 2007; Morris, Bernhardt, and Handcock 1994). To restrict analyses of social inequality to economic issues is limiting because inequality encompasses all differences between people that become embedded in the social structure and that influence social relations (Grabb 2007). Hence, among the other issues that are important to consider when examining social inequality are education, health, and unpaid labour.

Chapters 8 to 12 examine the ways in which the factors considered in the conceptual framework developed in Part I influence outcomes of

inequality in families (chapter 8), labour markets (chapter 9), schools (chapter 10), health (chapter 11), and states (chapter 12). These chapters show how class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race affect outcomes of inequality through the processes of production, distribution, and reproduction. Each chapter concludes with policy implications and directions for further research.

Chapter 8 examines inequality in families. In particular it considers how the processes of reproduction are organized in such a way as to assign the unpaid labour responsibility of housework and caring disproportionately to women and, when these tasks are paid for, to women in ethnic and racial minorities. The relationship between these issues and the processes of production and distribution are also explored. Finally, this chapter considers the power imbalances in families and the violence that occurs there.

Chapter 9 outlines aspects of inequality in labour markets. It considers changes in Canada's class structure, the polarization of income, and issues related to skill and alienation in the workplace. Each of these points, and related issues that classify jobs as good or bad, are examined. Chapter 9 also examines how the social organization of production processes and the relationship between production, distribution, and reproduction lead to inequality in various working conditions and in the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of paid work.

Chapter 10 considers educational attainment in Canada. In particular, it examines the barriers to education and how they are influenced by social class, race, ethnicity, gender, and age. It also examines the influence that each of these factors has historically had on educational attainment, how they affect educational attainment today, and the relationship between these factors and the returns on education achieved through labour markets.

Chapter 11 considers inequality in health in Canada. It critiques current theoretical perspectives that focus too little on how health experiences are structured by class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race. It moves on to consider the relationships between class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race and each of mortality, morbidity, mental health, lifestyle behaviour, and access to and use of health care services.

The state is ubiquitous; it weaves through all aspects of our lives and determines who is a deserving recipient of state benefits. The "deservingness" of Canadians revolves around the concept of citizenship, the central topic of chapter 12. Chapter 12 discusses unemployment insurance, parental benefits and maternity leave, social welfare, pensions, and Old Age Security and shows how they reproduce existing inequalities and shore up long-standing advantages for privileged groups. Chapter 12 also considers the role that the state plays in social regulation and how the law works to the advantage of some and the disadvantage of others.

Chapter 13 begins by summarizing the main points and findings of this book. Next, it discusses the ways in which research and policy would be improved by adopting an inclusive and integrated approach to inequality, such as the one outlined here. For instance, feminist scholars have long argued that much social policy, although seemingly gender-neutral, is not, and that this has harmful effects for women. We argue that the same can be said for age, ethnicity, and class and that when the four are considered together, the effects are particularly troublesome. The same is true of research. We argue that to understand social inequality, we must understand better how the bases of inequality are connected and how actors negotiate these structures in day-to-day life. Until we do so, our assessments of inequality will remain both biased and inaccurate.

Questions for Critical Thought

1. Some people argue that social welfare recipients are lazy, that they don't want to work, and that governments should not contribute to the "cycle of poverty" by providing these people with monetary assistance. These arguments focus on individual attributes in explanations of poverty. Discuss the alternative structural explanation of poverty.
2. What are the structural factors that contributed to the ebb and flow of poverty in Anna's life? How did agency affect the ebb and flow of poverty in her life? What role does social time play in explaining Anna's relative advantages and disadvantages throughout her life?
3. Is it possible to understand and explain poverty in Canada by considering only social class? Why or why not? Do you think other socio-demographic characteristics better explain poverty and inequality?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages to stratification approaches to social inequality?
5. What have you learned about poverty in Canada? Is it possible to work for minimum wage and also live above the poverty line? Were you surprised to learn how little many Canadians live on?
6. Map 1.2 shows data on cross-national income inequality. What does this data tell you about the relationship between income inequality and the state? As this data shows, Canada is far from the most equal society in the world. Does this surprise you? Why or why not?

Glossary

Critical approaches, critical theory Approaches to the study of social inequality that (1) assume that social relations are the essential elements of social structures and that (2) assume that social relations are characterized more by conflict than by consensus. Commentators sometimes reserve the term *critical theory* to refer to the work of scholars associated with the Frankfurt school of sociology. These theorists, however, have strong intellectual roots in Marxist and Weberian thought and were certainly not the first to think "critically" about social life.

Low-income cut-off (LICO) The level at which a family spends 63.9 per cent or more of its income on food, shelter, and clothing.

Low-income measure (LIM) A relative measure of low income that is set at 50 per cent of the adjusted mean household income. It is categorized by the number of persons in each household.

Market-based measure (MBM) An absolute measure of poverty that shows the level at which a household does not have the necessary income to purchase goods or essential services—healthy diet, clothing, shelter, personal care, etc.

Social inequality The existence of advantages and disadvantages in many aspects of social life, including income, education, health, opportunities for paid work, and unpaid work responsibilities. The study of social inequality involves an examination of the factors that contribute to meaningful differences in the rights, resources, and privileges of individuals and groups of people.

Social relations Fundamental elements of the social structure. The term does not refer to interpersonal relations. Rather, social

relations are structural and reflect power differences among groups of people. Examples of structured sets of social relations are class, age, gender, and ethnic and race relations.

Social structure A well-established pattern of social organization among the elements of society. Sociologists disagree over which elements of society are of most concern.

Stratification An approach to the study of social inequality that ranks individuals in a hierarchy on the basis of socially desirable characteristics such as income, status, wealth, or occupation. These approaches often draw on structural-functionalist thought and assume that social roles are the principal elements of the social structure.

Structures of inequality Durable patterns of social organization that influence social inequality.

Recommended Reading

Davies, Lorraine, Julie Ann McMullin, and William R. Avison. 2001. *Social Policy, Gender Inequality and Poverty*. Ottawa: Status of Women Canada. A study that uses both qualitative and quantitative data to examine how the social policy changes in Ontario in the mid-1990s affected poverty among women.

Grabb, Edward G., and Neil L. Guppy, eds. 2009. *Social Inequality in Canada: Patterns, Problems, and Policies*. 5th edn. Scarborough, ON: Pearson Education Canada. This is *the* information source on various aspects of social inequality in Canada.

Leisering, Lutz, and Stephan Leibfried. 1999. *Time and Poverty in Western Welfare Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. One of the very few books that take a life-course approach to poverty and emphasize agency in the transitions onto and off of social assistance.

National Council of Welfare. 2000. *Poverty Profile: A Report*. Ottawa: Minister of Works and Government Services Canada. An excellent source book with lots of data on and information about poverty in Canada.

Piketty, Thomas. 2013. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. This book focuses on wealth and income inequality in Europe and the United States since the eighteenth century.

Ross, David P., Katherine J. Scott, and Peter J. Smith. 2000. *The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development. This book provides a comprehensive overview of poverty in Canada.

Relevant Websites

Make Poverty History
www.makepovertyhistory.ca

**The Make Poverty History campaign, symbolized by a white bracelet, started in the United Kingdom and aims to increase awareness of absolute poverty and pressure governments into taking action toward relief. The Canadian chapter calls for urgent and meaningful policy change in four areas: more and better foreign aid, trade justice, cancelling the debts owed by poor countries, and the elimination of child poverty in Canada.

Campaign 2000—End Child and Family Poverty in Canada
www.campaign2000.ca

**Founded in 1991, Campaign 2000 is a cross-Canada movement to eliminate child poverty in Canada. This organization aims to build awareness and support for the 1989 House of Commons resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000. Nearly a decade past the deadline, this group continues to lobby all parties in the federal and provincial governments to enhance social policies relating to child care, social housing, community services, and labour market supports.

Raising the Roof—Long-Term Solutions for Canada's Homeless
www.raising theroof.org

** Raising the Roof provides national leadership on long-term solutions to homelessness through partnership and collaboration with diverse stakeholders, investment in local communities, and public education.

2

Class and Inequality

When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all.... People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years.

—Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*[*]

Introduction

The quotation that opens this chapter is from *Angela's Ashes* (1996), Frank McCourt's touching and funny yet disturbing memoir. Indeed, as one reads this book one wonders how Frank did survive his childhood. He did not have enough clothes to keep him warm, proper shoes for his feet, enough food, or much of a roof over his head. The neighbourhoods where he lived were decrepit and unsanitary. Frank's father was an alcoholic who couldn't hold down a job; his mother was chronically depressed and thought it improper for women to work. In reading this book, one also wonders why Frank's parents didn't do something to change their lives—if only Mr McCourt had stopped drinking and held down a job, and if only Mrs McCourt had gotten a job instead of "moaning by the fire." But to blame the McCourts' poverty on an individual's alcoholism or mental health ignores the complex reality of the social structures in which the McCourts were embedded. Class, gender, and ethnic structures in Ireland during McCourt's childhood (the 1930s) were pervasive. English imperialism over Ireland produced and reproduced economic and other hardships for the Irish. Advanced education was essentially unavailable to the poor, women, and minorities. Labour laws did little to protect workers, and as a result, the conditions of the "working man" were deplorable. And, on top of it all, because Frank's parents came of age during the Depression, paid work was hard to come by.

The conditions of Frank McCourt's childhood may be explained by his class position, which, in turn, negatively affected his

[*]McCourt, Frank. 1996. *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir*. New York: Touchstone.

family relations, education, and health. The McCourt family was in a state of constant conflict. Frank's mother and father either fought or did not speak to one another, and the children were often ignored and neglected. Education, beyond the state-required minimum, was unattainable. The children had various health difficulties, the most severe of which culminated in the death of Frank's baby sister.

Although the effects of the McCourts' class position are evident, a more complex question is, what accounts for their lower-class position? Is it because they had no money and little food? Is it because Mr McCourt rarely had a job and when he did it was a bad one? Is it because his family had too little power or authority to impose their will on others? Is it because Mr and Mrs McCourt were poorly educated? Sociologists who study social class and inequality often ask questions like these. Each of the causes mentioned above likely contributed to the economic hardship experienced by the McCourt family. As we will show throughout this book, understanding inequality in Canada is not a straightforward task and is often the result of interrelated economic, social, and biological factors.

There is considerable disagreement among sociologists over how to conceptualize social class, how many classes there are, the extent to which class conflict exists, and how classes are formed. These points of contention stem from the analysis of social class that was put forth by Karl Marx and then critiqued and expanded upon by Max Weber. Volumes have been written about these issues since, and it is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in all of these debates. Instead, the ensuing discussion will focus on the question of how to conceptualize social class and will venture into other areas of debate only if they are important to the argument being presented.

Marx and Marxism

Marx: Class as a Productive Social Relation

In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx ([1848] 1983: 203–4) wrote,

> The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed…. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: It has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—bourgeoisie and proletariat.

In these few lines Marx emphasizes the importance of class and class conflict in his work and implies that a distinctive feature of capitalism is the division of society into two central classes. But what is left unsaid here and in much of Marx's work is a precise definition of *class*, of what distinguishes capitalists from workers, and whether the polarization of the classes assumes that the **petite bourgeoisie** and others in the middle classes will become extinct. Ambiguity around these issues has led to various interpretations of who belongs to what class, how many classes there are, and what distinguishes the middle class from the others (Poulantzas 1975; Wright 1985).

Marx began what appears to be a systematic analysis of social classes in the last chapter of volume 3 of *Capital* ([1893–4] 1956: 178–9) but wrote only a few paragraphs before the project was interrupted. In the first two paragraphs Marx writes that the three classes of modern capitalist society are the owners of **labour power**, the owners of capital, and the

landowners, but he suggests that this is the pure form of class distinction. "Intermediate and transitional strata obscure the class boundaries" even in the case of England, where the "economic structure of modern society is indisputably the most highly and classically developed" (178). However, Marx dismisses strata distinctions as immaterial to his analysis because of the tendency of capitalism to transform labour into wage-labour, the means of production into capital, and landed property into a form that corresponds with the capitalist mode of production.

In the next paragraph of this last chapter of *Capital* ([1893–94] 1956: 178), Marx suggests that the answer to what constitutes a class can be determined by answering the question "What constitutes wage-labourers, capitalists and landlords as the three great social classes?" For Marx, the answer to this question does not come from examining differences in income or social status. Rather, the key is the means by which people earn income, through their labour power, capital, or landed property. In the concluding paragraph, Marx's analysis breaks off just as he suggests that this distinction is not complete.

On the basis of the scattered references to class throughout Marx's work, researchers generally agree that, in principle, Marx believed that society is divided into classes that are defined by their relationship to the principal means of production in society (Giddens 1971; Zeitlin 1990). Put simply, in capitalism those who own the means of the production (the **bourgeoisie**) exploit labourers (the **proletariat**), who have no choice but to sell their labour power to—or to work for—the bourgeoisie in order to survive. The emphasis in Marx's work, then, is on relationships between those who appropriate the labour of others to make a profit and those who need to sell their labour power to earn a living. Hence, Marx is not so concerned with how resources are distributed within capitalism and instead emphasizes the relationships among people who engage in economic systems of production. In this regard, the most distinctive element of Marx's theory of class is the notion of exploitation. For Marx, classes are defined by the social relations that connect people to resources associated with the means of production. These resources define the class structure and shape economic life chances.

According to Giddens (1971: 37), Marx developed a dichotomous conception of two antagonistic classes; these classes "are constituted by the relationship of groupings of individuals to the ownership of private property in the means of production." Marx recognized that, historically, class societies were more complex than this theoretical dichotomy revealed (Giddens 1971; Zeitlin 1990). He was also aware that in bourgeois society, classes were divided into strata and that there were individuals who were located at the margins of the class system, such as lumpenproletariat and a reserve army of labour (Giddens 1971).

Erik Olin Wright (1999: 5) identifies two themes from Marx's work on social class that help us define what is meant by *class* in Marxist sociology:

1. *Social class is based in productive relations.* That is, individuals who engage in production processes have various rights and powers over the resources that are used in production processes.
2. *Social class is conceptualized in relational terms.* Unequal access to the rights and powers associated with productive resources (which by definition is relational) is thought of as class relations. Ownership of the tools that are required in production processes is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being a member of the bourgeoisie. Thus, the issue is not simply that capitalists own machines, but that

> they "deploy those machines in a production process, hire owners of labor power to use them, and appropriate the profits from the use of those machines. A collector of machines is not, by virtue of owning those machines, a capitalist."

The preceding discussion focuses on two limitations to Marx's conceptualization of the class structure. Implementing a "classical" conception of social class in modern society is difficult. For example, we show that there is a great deal of uncertainty in Marx's work about how many classes there are (although most agree that Marx believed that as capitalism developed, society would become polarized into two central classes: the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*). We also discuss how we should conceptualize social classes that do not always fall neatly into either the "capitalist" or "working-class" categories. Indeed, these are two crucial issues for present-day Marxists.

Neo-Marxism: Issues of Exploitation, Authority, and Credentials

More than two decades ago, Alfred A. Hunter (1981: 12) observed that "contemporary Marxism is a growing and several-headed beast which defies simple, summary description." This observation still applies today. Some rather orthodox Marxists who believe that Marx got it right stray very little from his ideas and theories (Braverman 1974; Rinehart 2006). Others, while maintaining the basic premises of Marx's work, elaborate, modify, and extend his theories with the belief that social life, the economy, and the nature of work have changed too much since Marx's time to leave his theories unchanged (Poulantzas 1975; Wright 1997). Into this latter category falls the work of Erik Olin Wright.

Although many neo-Marxists have rethought Marx's ideas of social class, we will focus on Wright's class analysis because it has arguably been the most influential neo-Marxist approach to class issues, at least in North American sociology. Shortly after completing his doctoral dissertation in 1976, Wright began his international research on class structure and class consciousness. Since that time he has written an impressive amount of work on Marxist conceptualizations of social class and has rethought his original ideas of class several times.

Exploitation is a central dimension of Wright's latest approach to class analysis. He argues that the following principles form the basis of class exploitation:

a. The inverse interdependence principle: The material welfare of one group of people causally depends upon the material deprivations of another.
b. The exclusion principle: The inverse interdependence in (a) depends upon the exclusion of the exploited from access to certain productive resources, usually backed by property rights.
c. The appropriation principle: Exclusion generates material advantage to exploiters because it enables them to appropriate the labor effort of the exploited. (Wright 1997: 10; Wright 1999: 11)

According to Wright, if the first of these two conditions is met, "non-exploitative economic oppression" occurs but is not technically a situation of class exploitation per se. Exploitation exists only when all three principles are operating simultaneously.

Let's consider these principles by way of example. Consider gender and social inequality in relation to (a) and (b) above. In Canada, men's material advantage (e.g., better jobs, higher salaries) is causally dependent upon women's material deprivations. This is largely because women are excluded from having

access to certain productive resources primarily owing to their caregiving responsibility within families. This idea will become clearer in chapters 3 and 9. But the point here is that this is not class exploitation but rather, in Wright's terms, "non-exploitative economic oppression."

According to Wright, exclusions in (b) through ownership and the appropriation of labour are conditions of class-based exploitation. Consider, for instance, the owner of an auto parts manufacturing company. This person owns the factory or the infrastructure that is required to make the auto parts—the building, the machinery, and so on. In order for this owner to make a high income, the business needs to have a significant profit margin. To make a profit (that profit being the owner's material welfare), the owner of the company must pay those who work in the firm less (material deprivation) than they would make if the profits of the company were split equally among the workers. This is legitimized because the workers do not own the factory and have no property rights in this regard. In other words, owners take the work of those who work at their firm for their own benefit (appropriation) in order to make a profit. The result is class exploitation.

Note the relational component in each of these exploitation principles. Explicit in these statements is the idea that class exploitation involves social interaction and that this interaction is structured by sets of productive social relations that serve to bind exploiter and exploited together (Wright 1997: 12). Following Marx, Wright's conceptualization of class exploitation also highlights the presence in class relations of inherent conflict. Put simply, a profit-driven capitalist system requires that owners want workers to work longer, harder, and for less than the workers would freely choose to. Hence, class conflict results not simply over wage levels, but also over how much "work effort" is expected (Wright 1997: 18).

Turning back to the example of the auto parts manufacturing company owner and workers, it could be that if the owner reduced his profit margins, auto parts workers could work for half a year and make the wages that they currently make. But owners want to make as much money as possible in a profit-driven capitalist system, so they require a worker to work for the entire year earning the half-year salary.

Rising income inequality in Canada can be partly traced, at least in part, to steep declines in large-scale manufacturing. From 1980 to 2010 the percentage of the Canadian labour force employed in the manufacturing sector dropped from a fifth to a tenth of our population. This decrease coincided with low rates of unionization, which meant lower wages in the manufacturing sector that remained. Today, the likelihood of unions forming in new manufacturing sectors is small (Brady 2005; Tope and Jacobs 2009) because the **power resources** of the working class are low (Korpi 1983). This not only perpetuates, but likely increases the wage gap between low- and high-skilled workers (McCall 2001). In short, what has resulted is a shrinking of the middle class, at least in terms of income.

Canada's manufacturing sector once provided people with "good" working-class jobs, competitive wages, and greater job security. These jobs have since been replaced by lower-paying non-salaried service sector work (Andersen and McIvor 2013). As demonstrated in Box 2.1, Canada is not the only country that has felt the negative effects of declines in the manufacturing industry. The United States has arguably been more greatly affected.

To deal with the problem of "middle classes," Wright (1997) integrates two key concepts, authority and skill, into his ideas of exploitation. For Wright, authority involves domination and is one axis upon which employees in capitalist

Global perspective

Box 2.1 Manufacturing Jobs Have Taken a Hit in Today's Economy

OECD Picture

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, manufacturing employment in the United States prospered in 1979, employing more than 19.6 million Americans. Many of these jobs paid well, were unionized, and had decent benefit programs. However, between 2001 and 2010 the American economy shed 33 per cent of its manufacturing jobs, meaning that almost 5.8 million people lost their jobs. The vast majority of other OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries have also recorded major job losses, although for the most part, they have been less adversely affected than the United States. The United Kingdom and Sweden reported similar losses (35% and 32% respectively), whereas Germany lost only 11 per cent of its manufacturing jobs, Australia 20 per cent, and Canada 29 per cent (Pilat et al. 2006).

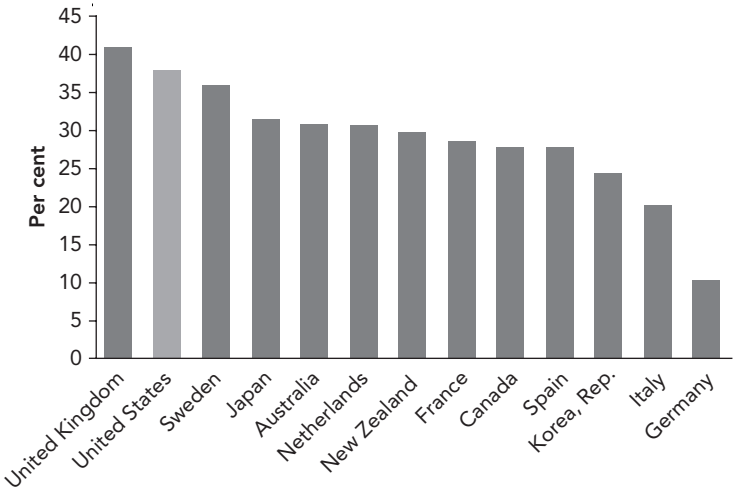
Few countries have been hit harder by this decline than the United States. Michigan, for example, was once a manufacturing hub in the US. Because of this prosperous industry, it was once the eleventh richest state (it is now only the thirty-fourth richest). Today, the average wage in the Michigan manufacturing sector is only half of what it was (above $10.50 per hour) only a decade ago (www.marketwatch.com).

Sources: Barry D. Wood. (August 20, 2013) "The new normal in Michigan factories is lower pay." *Marketwatch.com*; Pilat et al. 2006. www.marketwatch.com/story/the-new-normal-in-michigan-factories-is-lower-pay-2013-08-20; and Pilat et al. 2006.

systems are differentiated. If owners of capital relinquish control over the production process to managers or supervisors, then people in these positions have various degrees of authority and are able to dominate their subordinates in the workplace. Furthermore, managers and supervisors earn wages that are higher than the costs of producing and reproducing their labour power. Managers and supervisors are in contradictory class locations because (1) they earn higher wages than what makes sense under the logic of capitalism, (2) they help to exploit the workers they manage, and (3) the capitalists for whom they work exploit them (Wright 1997: 20–1).

The second axis of class differentiation in Wright's scheme is skill. As is the case with authority, there is an emphasis here on the wage. Because certain skills or credentials are scarce resources in certain labour markets, people who possess them are able to command a wage that is higher than the costs of producing and reproducing their labour power. Furthermore, when workers have control over knowledge or skill sets, their labour is hard to monitor or control (Wright 1997: 22–3).

In the end, Wright comes up with a class typology that is outlined in Figure 2.1. Here we see that people are cross-classified according to their relation to the means of production, their relation to scarce skills, and their relation to authority. Also included in this scheme is the number of employees. This latter classification category refers to the number of people under the authority of each particular class location. For example, managers tend to have many employees over whom they have authority and dominance, whereas non-managers have authority over no one. Owners are separated from employees in this scheme. Owners are differentiated from one another only on the basis of whether they have employees and, if so, how many. Hence, owners who have only a few employees are thought to be different from both those who have many and those who have none. Employees, on the other hand, are differentiated



Sources: *International Comparisons of Annual Labor Force Statistics, 1970–2012*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, International Labor Comparisons. www.bls.gov/fls/flscomparelf/lfcompendium.pdf; www.innovationfiles.org/how-americas-manufacturing-job-loss-outpaces-other-leading-industrialized-countries/

Relation to means of production

Number of employees	Owner	Employees			Relation to authority
Many	Capitalists	Expert managers	Skilled managers	Nonskilled managers	Managers
Few	Small employers	Expert supervisors	Skilled supervisors	Nonskilled supervisors	Supervisors
None	Petty bourgeoisie	Experts	Skilled workers	Nonskilled workers	Non-management
		Experts	Skilled	Nonskilled	

Relation to scarce skills

Figure 2.1 Wright's Class Typology

Source: Wright (1997: 25).

on the basis of skills, authority, and the number of employees "beneath" them. Expert managers, then, have high levels of authority and high levels of skill and tend to supervise many employees. They stand in most stark contrast to non-skilled workers, who have no authority and no skill and who supervise no other employees.

In this typology, the cells do not represent classes as such; rather, they refer to class locations within the capitalist class structure. The distinction here is a subtle but important one that allows Wright to cover all his bases. Unlike an earlier version of this framework, in which he refers to the various groupings in this model as classes (Wright 1985), in his most recent work Wright makes it clear that these cells represent class locations within an overriding framework of class relations.[1] In doing this, Wright can stay true to a Marxist version of class relations in which exploitation is at the core while at the same time identifying contradictory places within class relations that individuals occupy.

Again, let's turn back to the auto parts manufacturing company's owner and workers. The owner would fall in either the "capitalists" or the "small employers" cell of Wright's framework, while the worker could fall into any of the "employees" categories. Auto parts manufacturing companies have many employees, and occupations range from "expert managers" (head of the information technology department) to "non-skilled workers" (assembly-line workers). These workers are differentiated in terms of their class location: some have more authority and control in the workplace than others. But, according to Wright, regardless of the specific cell in which an employee is located, an exploitative, class-based relationship exists between that employee and the employer.

Wallace Clement and John Myles also take a Marxist approach to the study of social class. Through their work on Eric Olin Wright's Comparative Project on Class Structure and Class Consciousness, Clement and Myles (1994) developed a four-category class-classification scheme. As Table 2.1 shows, the capitalist-executive class controls both the labour power of others and the means of production. The "old" middle class—the petite bourgeoisie in Marxist terminology and in Wright's classification—commands the means of production but not the labour power of others (e.g., a local butcher owns her shop and employs one or two people). The "new" middle class controls the labour power of others but not the means of production. The advantage of this approach lies in its parsimony. It accurately explains the relations of ruling in Canada while at the same time eliminating the unnecessary and often tedious class-location distinctions of Wright's approach. And, although academically these distinctions are important, precise class categorizations matter little for those facing economic hardship. Box 2.2 tells the story of Canadian Eric Schuppert and his fall from Canada's middle class. It is stories like this that remind us that *actual people* live in, and fall out of, the class structure that social researchers theorize. Eric's life story reminds us of the importance of social class to inequality and also foreshadows the relationship between age and inequality that will be discussed in chapter 5.

Table 2.1 Clement and Myles's Class Typology

	Command Labour Power of Others	
Command Means of Production	**Yes**	**No**
Yes	Capital-executive	Old middle class
No	New middle class	Working class

Source: Clement, Wallace, and John Miles. 1994. *Relations of Ruling: Class and Gender in Postindustrial Societies*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, p. 61. Reprinted by permission of McGill-Queen's University Press.

HIGHLIGHT

Box 2.2 From Middle Class to Minimum Wage. With No Way Back

by Michael Valpy

Eric Schuppert's realization that he had left the middle class did not occur in 2008, when his $75,000-a-year salary with full benefits, pension and five weeks' paid vacation vanished along with his job as a public-service manager for the municipality of Caledon.

It did not occur when, at age 46, he had to borrow money from his parents to meet his monthly living costs. It did not occur when he was forced to sell his house in nearby Alliston.

It did not even occur when he found himself behind a counter at his local Tim Hortons—"Standing there in that crappy uniform with that dinky little hat on serving my friends coffee"—at the minimum wage of $10.25 an hour, taking direction from kids 20 years younger.

It occurred when the fear came to him that he would never be back to where he had been, that he was looking at a slammed-shut door to anything that resembled progress.

And with that fear, Schuppert, now 51 and working in Toronto as a night-shift college porter earning $30,000 a year, became part of a new phenomenon in Canada that social scientists haven't previously encountered: he self-deselected from the middle class.

Middle class is a state of mind, an emotional state, a feeling of optimism, a feeling of belonging to the great swath of Canadian society that has been resolutely marching forward in the sunshine for decades. It is an important element of social cohesion.

Eric Schuppert's narrative, to be sure, is about income and struggling to earn enough money to survive. But primarily it's about a place in society and his links to the connecting points of middle-class existence.

He's a soft-spoken, thoughtful, well-read man. He tells his story without complaints, and yet a listener can hear very clearly the pain he's experienced over the past five years.

He'd worked 22 years for Caledon, population 50,000, rising up the ladder from manager of aquatics to a senior recreation position to manager of customer services with a staff of 10. His job included being in charge of the municipal cafeteria, overseeing the municipality's office supplies and managing the public reception services.

On the day he was fired—"restructured" in the language of the municipality's human resources department—he asked his boss, the chief administration officer, if he'd done anything wrong and was told no, the municipality just figured they could do his job better and cheaper without him.

"It wasn't a fun day," says Schuppert. "But you can't let something like that ruin 22 years associated with a wonderful community."

The CAO sent out an email to the staff saying he was leaving "to pursue other opportunities."

It was a bad time in the fall of 2008 to be out of a job.

Initially Schuppert says he felt marginalized but not hurt—an interesting word he chooses: without a job, he felt pushed to the sidelines of life.

In the first six months after being restructured, he sent out about 100 resumés and got three interviews, none of which led to anything. By August 2009, he had run out of money and needed financial help from his parents. He realized at the same time he was going to have to take whatever job he could find and not wait for something commensurate with his skills and experience.

Within a week he had a job at a Tim Hortons outlet a five-minute walk from his house in Alliston, just north of Toronto. When his friends and neighbours came in, "I could see the click in their eyes when they recognized me, and then they moved on pretty quickly."

In addition to standing for an eight-hour shift taking orders, Schuppert had to move boxes around. He has a bad back. The work gave him constant pain. He lasted a month and then quit.

The local McDonald's offered him a job. He asked if there was a chance to move into management, was

continued

told yes, and was then assigned to be the overnight cleaner starting at midnight. He declined.

At this point he started to cut off his social connections.

He went to work for Swiss Chalet, again asking for an opportunity to move into management. He was told yes. He worked for nine months, was given periodic management training but never got beyond minimum wage.

"George saved me from full-blown depression," Schuppert says. George was his dog, arthritic and going blind, and Schuppert loved and cared for him.

He'd saved for 20 years to buy his house. His house was part of who he was in his community, in his circle of friends. His house was where he once gave parties and cooked dinners until he could no longer afford to do either. The For Sale sign stood on the street in front of his house for eight months, proclaiming his downward journey.

Schuppert found an apartment in the Beach where he could take George for long, healthy walks. He kept looking for a job. He was turned down for a City of Toronto posting that involved working on its 311 municipal service, which irritated him, because he had led the project to design the service at Caledon.

And then he got the college porter's job.

The college staff, he says, are wonderful. The students he enjoys. He likes the opportunity to help people. He's provided with dinner. "I'm underutilized but there's dick-all elsewhere."

There's also the night shift. "I didn't realize just how lost you are. I live at home alone. I get up in the morning and everyone else has gone to work. By the time I get home, it's 11 o'clock and everyone else is in bed. I spend the whole day alone and that's depressing.

There's the fear—the fear that's made him say he's no longer middle class. "I still don't see anything more than $30,000 a year in my future. That's not a lot of money for a single person in Toronto. My biggest fear now is that I'm going to wind up on the street. I've just got to get back to trying to find jobs. If I don't I'm going to be well on the path to the working poor. I think progress has passed me by."

There's what Eric Schuppert identifies as the middle class things that are gone.

"I used to go out for dinner.

"I used to throw dinner parties at home. I love to cook.

"I used to have parties all the time.

"Dating. How can I take someone out at 14 bucks an hour?

"I don't get to see concerts and events any more. I used to see live music all the time.

"I have lost the ability to buy new clothes of some quality. I did get used to wearing a jacket and tie for 10 years and looking sharp. It is definitely a status thing."

All things that middle class people do in middle class society.

"No house."

Middle class people own houses, or at least a condo.

"I'm wondering if I'll ever have a meaningful job using my skills and experience again."

Middle class people have meaningful work.

George died two months ago. Schuppert is now looking for a smaller apartment "down the chain."

Source: Michael Valpy. (December 13 2013). "From Middle Class to Minimum Wage With No Way Back." *The Star.* Reprinted courtesy of the Atkinson Foundation. www.thestar.com/news/atkinsonseries/2013/12/13/the_incredible _disappearing_middle_class.bb.html

Weber and the Neo-Weberians

Weber: Class, Power, and Distribution

Some scholars argue that Max Weber's assessment of social class is in fundamental opposition to that of Marx (Parsons 1929; J. Turner and Beeghley 1981). Others suggest that it is more likely that Weber attempted to develop Marx's thought—agreeing with some of his points, disagreeing with others, and elaborating upon his ideas in a way that corresponded to recent developments in the capitalist system (Zeitlin 1990). Indeed, some of the concepts that are central to Marx's analysis—class consciousness, class conflict, and class interest—are found in

Weber's writing as well (Zeitlin 1990). Weber also agrees with Marx regarding the importance of property ownership in the assessment of class (Giddens 1971; Zeitlin 1990).

For Weber, classes are groups of people who share a common class situation. In *Economy and Society*, Weber defines *class situation* as the

> typical chances of material provision, external position, and personal destiny in life which depend on the degree and nature of the power, or lack of power, to dispose of goods or qualifications for employment and the ways in which, within a given economic order, such goods or qualifications for employment can be utilised as a source of income or revenue. ([1922] 1978: 57)

Weber argues that there are three types of classes: property classes, income classes, and social classes. A *property class* is one in which differences in property ownership determine the class situation. An *income class* is one in which "the chances of utilising goods or services on the market determines the class situation" (Weber [1922] 1978: 57). A *social class* is a combination of the class situations created by property and income, and one where mobility between the social classes is a typical occurrence either within an individual lifetime or over successive generations.

Weber identifies four main social classes: (1) classes privileged by property or education; (2) propertyless intellectuals, technicians, commercial workers, and officials who are possibly different from one another socially, depending on the cost of their training; (3) the petite bourgeoisie; and (4) the working class as a whole. Although these social-class distinctions are similar to those proposed by Marx (except in the emphasis on education and on the cost of training), Weber employs a different method in assigning groups of individuals to each class. For Weber, classes are comprised of people who have similar command over economic resources and who have in common a causal component of their life chances (see the definition of class situation above). Marx, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with the social relations of production.

Parties and **status groups** are other pillars of social power according to Weber. By *parties*, Weber means voluntary associations that organize for the collective pursuit of interests, such as political parties or lobbying groups. A *status group* consists of a number of individuals who share a common status situation. Although members of a particular class may not be aware of their common situation, members of a status group usually are (Giddens 1971; Grabb 2007). Classes, status groups, and parties sometimes overlap, but not always. Thus, each is analytically distinct and central to any class analysis (Weber [1922] 1978; see also Giddens 1971; Grabb 2007).

Weber's assessment of status groups and parties and the analytical importance that he attaches to these multiple bases of **power** point to the fundamental difference between his analysis of class and Marx's. According to Weber, although status groups and parties are analytically distinct from classes, they are central to class analysis (Giddens 1971; Grabb 2007). For Weber ([1922] 1978), *status situations*, although related to class situations, are distinct from them and refer to the social status, prestige, and esteem that are associated with a social position. Unlike Marx, who believed that power is held by those who own the means of production, Weber felt that certain people in high-status groups derive power by virtue of their social position rather than through economic control.

The analytical importance that Weber attaches to the concept of power is evident in the preceding discussion. Unlike Marx, who believed that power relations are structural and cannot be separated from class relations, Weber ([1922] 1978: 38) defines *power* as "every possibility within a social relationship of imposing one's own will, even against opposition, without regard to the basis of this possibility." Weber

clarifies this broad definition of power by introducing the concept of **domination**. Domination exists in social relationships when one person (or group) comes to expect that their orders will be followed by the other person (or group) (Weber [1922] 1978: 38–9).

Domination is a specific power relation in which "regular patterns of inequality are established whereby the subordinate group (or individual) accepts that position in a sustained arrangement, obeying the commands of the dominant group (or individual)" (Grabb 2007: 56). Weber states that although relations of domination are usually at work in associations or in cases where an individual has an executive staff, other non-economic situations are also characteristic of relations of domination. One of the examples Weber gives is that the head of the household exercises domination over the members of the household "even though he does not have an executive staff" (Weber [1922] 1978: 39).

Although Weber recognized that subordinate groups or persons accept domination for a host of reasons, his analysis focuses on three pure types of legitimate domination, or *authority*. *Traditional authority* is a dominating relationship based on the acceptance that those in charge should be in charge because of traditional right. Individuals might also be in dominant relationships based on *legal authority*, in which case subordinates accept the legal right of those in charge. Finally, *charismatic authority* refers to the situation in which leaders have control of others because of the leaders' appeal or charm (Weber [1922] 1978).

Three themes in Weber's concept of class separate his work from that of Marx. First, Weber's insistence that classes, class situations, parties, and status groups must all be considered if we are to understand the class structures of societies differs significantly from Marx's view. Second, and related to the first, is Weber's emphasis on power. Marx felt that power was derived from an economic base and was largely structural. Weber, on the other hand, saw power as multi-faceted, derivable from many sources, and with both structural and individual dimensions. And third, rather than adopting the social-relational approach to class in Marxist sociology, Weber focuses far more on distributional issues. For Weber, people's ability to gain access to scarce resources such as income and education is central to any analysis of class. Indeed, these three central themes of Weber's work lie at the heart of its appeal.

Neo-Weberian Approaches: Frank Parkin

In the tradition of Weber, power is a central component of Frank Parkin's approach to class analysis. But Parkin takes a rather different view of power than Weber, and indeed suggests that Weber's definition is unhelpful (Parkin 1979). Instead, Parkin discusses power in relation to the idea of social closure. *Social closure*, as discussed by Weber, refers to processes through which collectivities restrict access to resources and opportunities to those inside the group. According to Parkin, classes should be defined not in relation to the means of production, but rather in relation to their modes of social closure.

Parkin argues that the classes of the bourgeoisie are formed and continue through two means of social closure, one involving property and the other involving credentials. The issue for property ownership is that the exclusionary powers of certain groups determine the basis of whether individuals own property that can be used in production processes. The legal, exclusionary property rights that come with this ownership are critical for class analysis to the extent that they have "important consequences for the life chances and social condition of the excluded" (Parkin 1979: 53). The crucial issue in this exclusionary process of social closure is not exploitation, but whether property owners

can legally exclude people from making a living. Hence, the role of the state in legitimizing social closure is central to Parkin's framework.

The second means through which social closure is invoked is *credentialism*, which is the "inflated use of educational certificates as a means of monitoring entry to key positions in the division of labour" (Parkin 1979: 54). Credentialism allows high-status occupations to limit entrance to their ranks by making the credentials for entrance into the occupation increasingly onerous. Professional occupations thereby limit the supply of their labour, thus heightening its value and status. Credentialism also masks variations in skill among the members of a professional group and in that way protects the least skilled among them from the sanctions that might otherwise come their way (less pay, demotion, firing). As is the case with exclusion on the basis of capital ownership, the state is important in legitimizing the exclusionary practices of credentialism. States legitimize exclusionary strategies by issuing professional licences only to members of professional organizations who have achieved the credentials required by the professional organization.

Recall that Parkin argues that social classes should be defined in relation to the modes of social closure. The two central modes of closure for Parkin are exclusion on the basis of property and exclusion on the basis of credentials. Both modes of closure use exclusionary rules to confer rights and privileges on some while denying those rights and privileges to others. Hence, according to Parkin, "the dominant class under modern capitalism can be thought of as comprising those who possess or control productive capital and those who possess a legal monopoly of professional services" (1979: 58).

That said of the dominant classes, the question that remains is, how does Parkin deal with subordinate class boundaries? If exclusionary practices are power tactics that dominant classes use to maintain social closure, then, for Parkin, *usurpation strategies* are countervailing uses of power mobilized by subordinate classes to gain access to scarce resources or to achieve "distributive justice" (1979: 75). Members of subordinate classes have no legal property rights and have limited credentials. However, subordinate classes vary in the extent to which they can activate usurpation strategies. For instance, if a group of workers is unionized, those workers have considerably more usurpation power by which to achieve distributive justice than do workers who are not unionized (Parkin 1979). The middle classes, for Parkin, consist of persons who tend not to have legal property rights but who do have certain credentials. There is also variation among semi-professionals in the power they have to encroach on the privileges of professional groups. Such power depends, in large part, upon how successful a semi-professional group has been in gaining legitimate authority in the eyes of the state and of group members' clients. Semi-professionals are not, however, completely aligned with the "working class," for they use usurpation strategies to gain privilege and exclusionary strategies to maintain the privilege they already have. Parkin (1979) refers to this as a *dual-closure strategy*.

Several well-founded criticisms are levied against Parkin for his emphasis on the legal bases of power to the neglect of other dimensions of power (see Grabb 2007). But what is particularly problematic about Parkin's approach is his use of the term *power* to refer to the strategies that subordinate classes use for gaining access to scarce resources and privileges. This lies at the heart of Parkin's argument regarding class boundaries. Notably, Parkin sees usurpation as a mechanism of closure that is less powerful than exclusion, but does it really make sense to discuss this as an issue of power? We think not. Power is held by dominant groups in society and is structural in form. Individuals may draw on the power they have by virtue of being a member of a dominant

group in order to get what they want. However, as Parkin points out, power is much more than the ability of an individual to exercise his or her will over someone else. To be sure, subordinate groups act; they struggle to get higher wages, more prestige, or more status—they mobilize themselves and lobby to achieve these goals. But do they use power in doing so? No. At best, to gain distributive justice, they use mechanisms such as resistance, influence, or persuasion.

The idea that subordinate groups do not hold real power is worth pursuing here. Parkin is certainly not the only scholar who argues that subordinate groups or individuals have power (see Giddens 1979). More radical thinkers such as Wright (1997) argue that workers have power because they control their labour and can therefore use that control to struggle for their interests. Yet although it is true that, collectively, workers can generate opposition to capital because they control their labour, to suggest that they are in a position of power as a result is misplaced. Further, although it is also true that a worker could choose not to work, the alternative to working for a wage is rather bleak in contemporary capitalism. Is this then a true choice that confers power upon the labourer? Imagine this rather extreme analogy: A man is being held at gunpoint in a secluded area by another man, who is demanding that the first man hand over his wallet. The victim in this case has two choices—he can either hand over the wallet or not. Suppose he chooses not to and is shot. The victim acted, he made a choice, and he used his agency, but did he use power in this situation? No. This analogy demonstrates that clear distinctions need to be made between power and agency, and this is true even in situations that are far less extreme.

Ironically, though, the strength of Parkin's approach lies in this criticism of his concept of power. In Parkin's model, the importance of human action, both collective and individual, is evident. Hence, his model effectively considers the intersection of individual action and social structure, and on this score it is an improvement over most theoretical and empirical accounts of social inequality.

Neo-Weberian Approaches: John Goldthorpe

The class schema of John Goldthorpe and his colleagues (see also Erickson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarero 1979; Goldthorpe 1980; Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992) is widely used in comparative class analysis. Following Weber's classic theory, this conceptualization of class takes into account differences in life chances (i.e., "experiences of affluence or hardship, of economic security or insecurity, of prospects of continuing material advance, or of unyielding material constraints" [Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992: 236]), and it groups classes based on their command over economic resources.

This conceptualization of class differentiates the positions people hold within labour markets and production units, but it also acknowledges differences in employment relations (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992: 37). In this regard, one distinction is based on employment positions that are regulated by *labour contracts* compared with those based on *service* relationships. Differences in employment relations are given close attention in Goldthorpe's famous book *The Constant Flux*:

> Employment relationships regulated by a labour contract entail a relatively short-term and specific exchange of money for effort. Employees supply more-or-less discrete amounts of labour, under the supervision of the employer or of the employer's agents, in return for wages which are calculated on a "piece" or time basis. In contrast, employment relationships within a bureaucratic context involve a longer-term and generally more diffuse exchange. Employees render service to their employing organization

> in return for "compensation" which takes the form not only of reward for work done, through a salary and various perquisites, but also comprises important prospective elements—for example, salary increments on an established scale, assurances of security both in employment and, through pensions rights, after retirement, and, above all, well-defined career opportunities. (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992: 41–2)

Goldthorpe's schema is heavily organized by employment relationships related to service and labour contracts. Classes are also organized by skill level, specialized knowledge, expertise, and job reward. Those who belong to the "service class" are often trusted more by their employers and are given greater workplace autonomy. Lower- and working-class occupations are more often closely regulated, non-salaried, and have more precarious contractual obligations.

Table 2.2 displays three versions of Goldthorpe's class concept. As this table shows, some class groups can be aggregated together to produce more simplified versions. Class "I" is comprised of high-grade professionals, technicians, and managers. Class "II" represents lower-grade workers in these positions. For example, an economics professor at the Richard Ivey Business School in London, Ontario, would belong to Class "I," whereas a grade 9 math teacher at London Central Secondary would belong to Class "II." Employees in Class "III," or the "routine non-manual" class, are distinct from higher service sector employees because they tend to be paid hourly wages instead of salaries and are often non-unionized. Examples include administrative staff, commerce, and secretarial workers. Class "IV" includes self-employed and small-scale business owners (petite bourgeoisie). In some categorizations, farm owners are included in this class, but as

Table 2.2 The Goldthorpe Class Schema

11-Class (Maximally Disaggregated) Version	7-Class Version	4-Class Version
I Upper service class	**I** Upper service class	**I+II** Service class
II Lower service class	**II** Lower service class	
IIIa Routine non-manual employees, higher grade	**III** Routine non-manual	**III+V** Intermediate class
IIIb Routine non-manual employees, higher grade		
IVa Small proprietors with employees	**IV** Petty-bourgeoisie	**IV** Petty-bourgeoisie
IVb Small proprietors without employees		
IVc Farmers and other self-employed workers in primary production		
V Lower grade technicians and supervisors of manual workers	**V** Technicians and supervisors	**III+V** Intermediate class
VI Skilled manual workers	**VI** Skilled manual	**VI+VII** Manual class
VIIa Semi- and unskilled manual workers (not in agriculture)	**VII** Non-skilled manual	
VIIb Semi- and unskilled manual workers in agriculture		

Source: From Richard Breen, (2005), "Foundation of a neo-Weberian class analysis", Erick Olin Wright (ed.), *Approaches to Class Analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 41.

Table 2.2 shows, they could represent a distinct class in and of themselves. The remaining classes make up the lower, most unequal segment of Goldthorpe's class schema. Class "V" (lower-level routine non-manual workers), Class "VI" (skilled manual workers), and Class "VII" (unskilled manual workers) engage primarily in labour contracts with their employer, earn lower wages, and are much more precarious in their employment positions than the ones mentioned above. Examples include cashiers or custodians (Class "V"), pipefitters or master mechanics (Class "VI"), and construction labourers and lawn maintenance workers (Class "VIII").

Neo-Weberian Approaches: Edward Grabb

In Edward Grabb's work on social inequality and social class, power is of central importance. According to Grabb (2007: 211), power is the "differential capacity to command resources, which gives rise to structured asymmetric relations of domination and subordination among social actors." In an elaborate scheme of power, domination, and social inequality, Grabb (2007: 211) suggests that there are three means of power—control of material resources, control of people, and control of ideas—that correspond primarily with economic structures, political structures, and ideological structures respectively (see Figure 2.2). These structures of power are crossed by class and non-class bases of inequality that represent the "human content" of power relations. Hence, like Parkin, Grabb should be commended for rightly emphasizing the dualism between structure and human agency.

Grabb defines *class* on the basis of ownership, education, and occupation. For Grabb, these factors represent a synthesis of the key concepts in class analysis discussed by other influential class analysts, such as Wright and Parkin. *Ownership* includes ownership of property but also material possessions and income. *Education* comprises credentials and knowledge. *Occupation* involves distinctions such as manual versus non-manual labour but also includes issues of skill. Grabb (2007: 214–15) suggests that although classes should not be considered in static terms because they vary over time and space (i.e., historically and across different regions and countries), there tend to be three main class categories in modern capitalist systems: an upper class, a heterogeneous central category, and a working class. Like Wright and Parkin, Grabb defines the working class as those who do not own capital, have no special skills or credentials, and sell their labour to make a living. The upper class consists mostly of the capital owners, although persons with significant political or ideological power fall into this category as well. The middle class is a diverse group that may or may not have limited ownership but that is distinguishable from the working class mostly on the basis of credentials.

According to Grabb, the means of power (economic, political, and ideological) are differentially distributed along class lines. Of course, people in the upper classes control the means of material production or the economic structure by virtue of their ownership of the means of production. The middle classes may have some economic power depending on whether their incomes are sufficient to purchase desirable consumer goods and to the extent that their occupation confers upon them a certain amount of authority or autonomy. And the working classes tend not to have economic power at all. In Grabb's scheme, class also crosses political and ideological structures of power. Hence, those in the upper class, by virtue of their capital, high levels of education, and good occupations, tend to

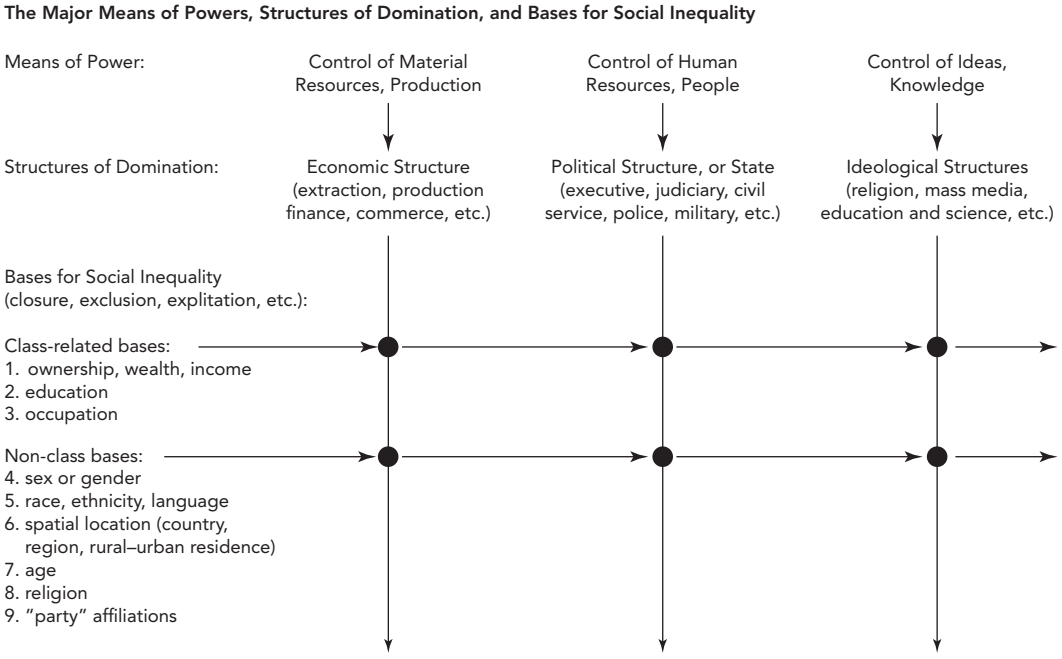


Figure 2.2 Grabb's Conceptual Framework

Source: Grabb, Edward. 2007. *Theories of Social Inequality*. 5th edn. (Toronto: Thomson Nelson) p. 212.

control political and ideological institutions such as the judiciary and educational systems. Those in the working class tend not to have ideological or political power, and those in the middle class vary in the extent to which they hold such power, again on the basis of class-related factors.

Assuming that social inequality is a multi-faceted phenomenon that involves many bases of inequality (as most researchers and theorists now acknowledge), then both Grabb's and Parkin's work represents significant conceptual contributions to understanding inequality. Why? Because the emphasis in both frameworks is on power, not class. The inherent problem with theories of inequality that begin with class is that other bases of inequality, such as gender, "race," ethnicity, and age, carry less theoretical significance. Notably, in both Grabb's and Parkin's work, class takes a certain primacy, but there is nonetheless room for conceptual development in each approach across the other significant bases of social inequality.

One minor point in Grabb's framework needs to be addressed: the underlying tendency in his approach toward a reification of the structures of power. According to Grabb, the organizations and collectivities that compose the power structures operate in complex ways, and "together they largely determine the nature and extent of inequality in society, what the social bases for inequality will be and how much they will matter" (2007: 213). Thus, although Grabb discusses a "dualistic view of power," it is unclear whether or how people act within power structures to either resist or maintain them (see chapter 6 for an in-depth discussion of agency).

The Death of Social Class? Economic Prosperity and Globalization

Following the Second World War, many OECD economies made significant economic gains—their economies prospered, wages increased, and income inequality lowered to levels not seen for many years. According to Ronald Inglehart (1987), economic security stemming from sustained economic growth had reduced the importance of economic issues and class conflict. This was the foundation for Inglehart's **postmaterialist thesis**. Inglehart argues that people in modern industrial society no longer concern themselves with social class issues or material concerns. He argues that most people—including those in the working class—have become "affluent enough" and no longer worry about poverty, inequality, and economic well-being. Building on this argument, others have made even more extreme claims, suggesting the "Death of Class" (Clark and Lipset 1991; Pakulski and Waters 1996a, 1996b). The argument is simple: social class identity has become of little importance for values and behaviours, and as a result, people's attention has drifted elsewhere.

For other researchers, globalization is the cause of waning class relations. The quite recent insurgence of globalization in sociological discourse is interesting because *globalization* is "a new word for an old process": "the integration of the global economy that began in earnest with the launch of the European colonial era five centuries ago" (Ellwood 2001: 12). However, the recent accelerated pace of globalization has been fuelled by rapid technological change, an unprecedented number of free trade agreements, and the powerful rise of multinational corporations; this has led to heightened concerns over the impact of globalization on nation-states and individuals (Ellwood 2001).

According to Ulrich Beck, *globalization* refers to the convergence of economic, political, cultural, and social changes emergent in the "second modernity" (Beck 2000; Beck, Bonss, and Lau 2003). A key aspect of these changes is that boundaries that were rigid and fixed in the first modernity now prove to be malleable (Beck, Bonss, and Lau 2003). The globalization of labour is evident in, for instance, the "social despatialization of work and production" (Beck 2000: 73). Individualization, gender revolution, underemployment, and global risks lead, within the context of globalization, to a "new kind of society" that is organized according to the rules of a "new kind of capitalism" and a "new kind of economy" (Beck 1999: 2). All of this, in turn, means that risks in employment or other aspects of social life are extending their reach to groups that have previously been sheltered from them (Beck 1999).

There may be some merit to Beck's argument. Fears over job losses in Canada and the United States as a result of globalization are reaching beyond the manufacturing sector to semi-skilled work (Villarreal and Fergusson 2014). But, for Beck and others, the rise in global economic capitalism means that social class, which has traditionally been assessed according to national boundaries, is dead, or at least of less significance today than in the past (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; see also Pakulski and Waters 1996a; Kingston 2001).

Although it is true that, with increases in globalization, risk is being distributed to other classes and groups (see Beck 1992), alienation and exploitation are still organizational features of capitalism and the working class is still at *heightened* risk of unemployment and poverty, pointing to the continued importance and relevance of social class (Goldthorpe 2002).

Our discussion above has outlined a conceptual framework for understanding social class—that is, how many there are, the sources of class conflict, and how they are formed. This discussion begs the question of whether class structures are comparable across modern societies. Is belonging to the working class in Canada the same as belonging to the working

class in the United States? What about in much more equal countries like Norway, Denmark, or Sweden? In fact, research shows that class structures are remarkably similar (in terms of distributions) across the developed world. However, just because the composition of social classes is similar does not mean workers in all countries share similar work experiences, enjoy the same comfortable wages, and have similar levels of job security. Throughout Part II of this book, we will show that class inequality varies according to national context and that oftentimes politics and the state play crucial roles in its development.

As an example, an auto worker in Sweden or Denmark has much greater economic opportunity (higher wages, more benefits, and greater job security) than auto workers in other parts of the world. This is because early class struggle and class politics in Scandinavian countries set a benchmark for greater equality. Recall Box 2.1 and its discussion of low-wage factory work in Michigan. Though the size of the working class may be similar in comparative perspective, the opportunities and resources available to workers are not.

The story becomes even more complicated when we think of class comparisons between the *developed* and the *developing* world. Do social classes exist in countries like Rwanda or China, and if so, are they comparable to the class structures in Canada, the United States, and other industrialized countries? That income inequality is so much higher in the developing world makes the nature of social classes much different. Box 2.3 discusses economic inequality, economic growth, and income differences in South Africa.

Global perspective

Box 2.3 Income Inequality, Economic Growth, and Social Class in South Africa

Poverty and Economic Inequality

According to standard measures of poverty, nearly 47 per cent of South Africans were considered poor in 2013. In 1994, this figure was 45.6 per cent, suggesting that unlike what was reported by the World Bank in chapter 1, poverty may be growing in South Africa rather than declining. Other measures of economic inequality are also jarring: South Africa's national unemployment rate is 25.4 per cent, and its GINI coefficient is 0.69, making the country one of the most unequal in the world.

According to Haroon Bhorat, a lack of economic growth in South Africa is responsible for stagnant income inequality in many of South Africa's most impoverished regions. According to Bhorat (2013), it will be very difficult for South Africa's economy to grow because the only sectors that are prosperous are those that are highly organized (through unions) and that employ workers who are well educated and skilled. As a result, very little growth occurs in poorer regions making it difficult for income and wealth to be spread equally.

To address income inequality more successfully, economic growth needs to be more inclusive regarding smaller enterprises, rural areas, and the young and jobless. This is no simple task. South Africa has among the most unequal income distributions in the world: approximately 60 per cent of the population earns less than US$7,000 per year, whereas only 2.2 per cent of the population has an income exceeding about US$50,000. The number of people living on less than $1 a day doubled to four million in 2006 (Klein 2007). According to Leo Zeilig, South African poverty is rooted in a historic relationship of exploitation within a larger capitalist system. The resistance of industrial development under colonialism and the reliance on single-commodity export economies have combined to produce debt crises, collapses of infrastructure, widespread poverty, and significant cross-class income difference across South Africa's large population.

Sources: Bhorat (2013); Klein (2007); Zeilig (2002).

A Note on Stratification Approaches

It would be remiss to discuss social inequality without paying heed to social stratification research. Indeed, stratification approaches to social inequality have been very influential, particularly in American sociology. As noted in chapter 1, stratification approaches conceptualize inequality as a hierarchal order (Davis and Moore 1945), in which individuals are grouped into strata on the basis of their income, education, occupation, prestige, or status. Inequality, then, tends to be conceptualized at the level of individual difference rather than in relational terms or on the basis of class structures (Grabb 2007: 112–13; Tilly 1998: 27–31). Traditionally, stratification approaches have assumed that the rank ordering of people into socially defined strata is a universal and functionally necessary dimension of society (Davis and Moore 1945). In other words, some ordering of people according to their worth, variously defined, is required for the smooth functioning of society. Certain positions in society are more valued than others because of the high level of skill attached to them. Only a few people can attain the skill required to fulfill these positions, and the appropriate training for such attainment requires significant time. People who choose to invest the time in such training deserve higher-status positions in society and the resultant rewards attached to these positions. Furthermore, there is general agreement among the members of society that such stratification systems are acceptable (Davis and Moore 1945).

Nonetheless, there are two common underlying assumptions in contemporary stratification research that set it apart from the Marxist or Weberian approaches to inequality discussed in this chapter. The first is the tendency to overemphasize the extent to which society operates on the basis of consensus. The second, related to the first, is the underemphasis in stratification research on issues of power and exploitation (see Grabb 2007 for an extensive discussion of these issues). These are the crucial problematic assumptions of stratification research that scholars have taken issue with for decades and that are highlighted by Melvin Tumin's 1953 response to Davis and Moore's 1945 seminal article "Some Principles of Stratification" (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Some Principles of Stratification

Davis, K., and W.E. Moore. 1945. "Some Principles of Stratification." ***American Sociological Review*** **10: 242–9.**	**Tumin, M. 1953. "Some Principles of Stratification: A Critical Analysis."** ***American Sociological Review*** **18: 378–94.**
(1) Within any society, certain positions are functionally more important than others and require special skills for their operation.	(1) There is no clear understanding of what is meant by "functionally important"; rather, judgments are usually arbitrary, based upon the dispensability and replaceability of a particular division of skills in the population.
(2) There is a limited number of individuals who have the particular talent to be trained in the skills required for the functionally more important positions.	(2) The range of talent within any society is not known within stratified systems, as there are obstacles to the exploration of available talent. This is true of societies where the opportunity to discover talent is dependent upon the resources of the parent generation. In addition, the unequal distribution of rewards of the parent generation results in the unequal distribution of motivation in the succeeding generation.

(3) A period of training is necessary for the conversion of talent into skill, during which period sacrifices are made.	(3) The two sacrifices are said to be a loss of earning power and the cost of training. However, the latter is usually assumed by parents, and the former becomes inconsequential as those with training acquire much higher wages than their untrained counterparts once they are employed.
(4) In order that an individual may be persuaded to endure these sacrifices, positions must contain inherent value in the form of privileged access to scarce rewards.	(4) There are an assortment of alternative motivational mechanisms that could be institutionalized and used effectively, such as the "joy of work" inherent in a position.
(5) These scarce goods consist of rights and advantages attached to or built into the positions and can be organized into those things which contribute to (a) sustenance; (b) humour and diversion; (c) self-respect and ego expansion.	(5) There are alternative rewards that could be used, but Davis and Moore's analysis does not allow for this.
(6) The consequence of differential access to rewards is the differential of the prestige and esteem which various strata acquire. This, along with rights and privileges, constitutes institutionalized inequality, or social stratification.	(6) There has been no demonstration that it is unavoidable that differential prestige and esteem shall accrue to positions that command differential rewards in power and prestige.
(7) Therefore, social inequality in the amounts of scarce goods and in the amounts of prestige and esteem individuals receive is functional and inevitable.	(7) The only things that must be distributed unequally are the power and property necessary to accomplish particular tasks. If in this differential, power and property are deemed merely to correspond to the differential responsibilities, and to be resources rather than rewards, then it is not necessary that differential prestige and esteem follow.

The identification of problematic assumptions in stratification research has not, however, led to its demise. Such research remains influential in studies of inequality and informs much empirical research on the subject. Grimes (1991: 212) argues that many researchers apply stratification measures to the study of class inequality either because they remain committed to certain aspects of functionalist thought or because stratification measures are often used in large surveys. It is important to clarify that stratification researchers do not suggest they are studying class and that class researchers, though they sometimes do stratification research, make the distinction between the class and stratification. The point that Grimes makes is nonetheless an important one that stems, perhaps, from a more general observation that researchers whose primary interest lies outside of class and stratification analysis tend to confound the two approaches. This propensity is most likely a result of the significant overlap among the various social factors that are examined in these approaches. For instance, occupation, defined in various ways, tends to be at the core of research on social inequality regardless of theoretical perspective. Further, there is a general concern in all conceptual frameworks over the distribution of scarce resources such as income, education, and skill. Hence, the tendency to use stratification measures as indicators of inequality likely stems from the continued use of traditional measurements in survey research and from the fact that the indicators of social inequality are quite similar, regardless of theoretical perspective.

Conceptualizing Social Class in a Framework of Inequality

The preceding discussion highlights several issues central to the conceptualization of social class—power, exploitation, oppression, property ownership, education, and so on. All of these approaches contribute in one way or another to the working definition of *social class* presented here. In this section we draw on approaches discussed above to develop a concept of social class that is compatible with the view that gender, age, ethnic, and race relations are equally important structural dimensions of inequality.

One way to approach our understanding of social inequality is to consider how social processes are shaped by structured sets of social relations such as class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race. Three such processes that are critical for individual and societal survival are production, distribution, and reproduction. According to Marx, *processes of production* are the ways by which raw materials are converted into useful and valuable objects (Allahar 1995). *Processes of distribution* are the ways in which material resources change hands in society (Acker 1988, 1989; Weber [1922] 1978). Distributive processes include wage, state, personal, and marital transfers (Acker 1988). The term *processes of reproduction* refers to the ways in which life is maintained both daily and from one generation to the next; these processes include "how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and elderly, and the social organization of sexuality" (Laslett and Brenner 1987: 382).[2] The mere fact of these social processes does not necessarily imply an outcome of social inequality, but understanding the historical context and the nature of the social relations that structure these processes is fundamental to understanding and explaining social inequality (McMullin 2000).

A central problem in traditional class analysis is that it has focused far too much on production to the neglect of reproduction and, to a lesser extent, distribution. Yet class relations are social relations that extend beyond the arena of production; Marxist approaches that conceptualize social class simply as a relation of production are too restrictive. This is true, in part, because traditional class analysis excludes far too many people who are not directly linked to production processes, such as homemakers and retired individuals. Notably, scholars have tried to reconcile this problem by attributing to homemakers the social class of their husbands and by assigning a class to retired persons based on their pre-retirement status. However, none of these approaches is satisfactory because they do not capture important distributive and status differences between housewives and their husbands or between a retired auto worker and her employed counterpart (see Acker 1988; Estes 1999).

How then do we conceptualize social class in such a framework? At the outset, it is important to point out that there are many indicators of social class—occupation, education, status, income, wealth, ownership—all of which tell us something about class-based inequality. However, these indicators cannot fully capture the view of social class presented in this book. Instead, as we suggested above, a relational understanding of social class is necessary. Such an understanding follows a long tradition in Marxist sociology that suggests that class is not merely an economic matter. Rather, social class manifests itself when people from various classes interact with one another. On the shop floor, employers and employees interact with one another in production processes, and it is through that interaction that