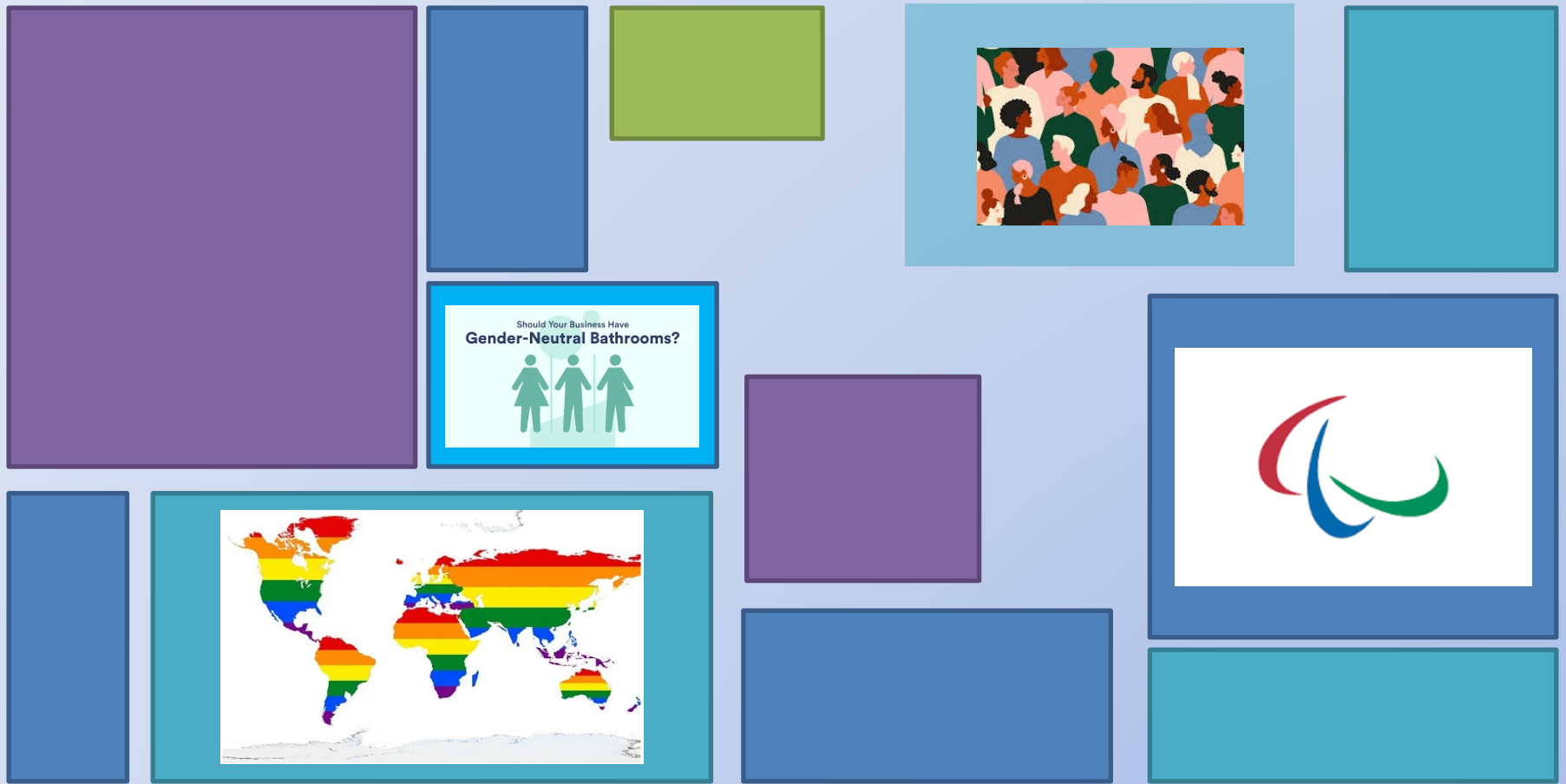




EC SO5001: Diversity & Difference in a Modern World

Theme 4: Equality, Equity and the (Re)Production of Inequality

Learning Review



What did we look at in our previous Theme?

Equality and Equity

Think about the terms equality and equity.

*What do each of the terms mean to you?
Do they mean the same thing or are they different?*

*You can use the guided study sheet to record your
thoughts.*



Guided Study Activity: Equality & Equity

Feedback to your Tutor

Equality: the historical debate

Equality of opportunity

- Refers to the chance of obtaining society's rewards on the basis of merit rather than social advantage (e.g. education, wealth)

Inequality of opportunity

- Unequal access to society's rewards due to social background (e.g. poverty, race, gender)

Equality of condition

- Equal access to society's rewards irrespective of either merit or social background*

* We will return to this concept later in this Theme

Types of Inequality

Historically, inequality has been used to refer to:

- Unequal distribution of valued resources (e.g. capital)
- Unequal distribution of valued opportunities in society (e.g. education)
- Unequal distribution of power in society
- It is a multi-dimensional concept which covers disparities of Income, Wealth, Prestige, Power, Access & Opportunity

(Walsh, Stevens & Moore, 2000, P. 62).

However, it is becoming increasingly common to discuss equity/inequity rather than equality/inequality

Equality or Equity

Equality = Sameness

- i.e. giving everyone the same thing (money, support etc)
- This only works if everyone starts in the same place.

Equity = Fairness

- i.e. giving everyone what they need in order to play an equal role in society
- This attempts to remove disadvantages in society



Equality or Equity: An example

Health

The World Health Organisation (No date) states that;

‘Equity is the absence of avoidable, unfair, or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically or by other means of stratification.’



Paraphrase this statement

"Health equity" or "equity in health" implies that ideally everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential.



Equality or Equity: An example

Health

In the UK everyone has access to free health care at the point of delivery (**equality**).

But levels of health differ depending on where you live, what you earn and other factors (**inequity**)



Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation - Health



Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation – Health Map

Social Reproduction of Inequality

- Refers to the process by which people's position in society and their 'life chances' are maintained and repeated from generation to generation
- In the past this was mainly used to describe the experience of the working or labouring classes

Based on (Laslett & Brenner, 1989; Clarke, 2000 *cited in* Luxton & Bezanson, 2006, p. 3).

- However it is now used to refer to any 'intergenerational' repetition of inequality due to class, ethnicity, gender etc.

Social Reproduction of Inequality

Includes lack of control over the provision of and access to:

- Food
- Clothing
- Shelter
- Basic Safety
- Health Care
- Jobs
- Education
- Leisure

As well as influence over the development and transmission of:

- Knowledge
- Social values & norms
- Cultural Practices
- The construction of individual and collective identities

But who is in control?

- Social reproduction is a complex and dynamic process which includes;
 - Various actors (e.g. family, partners, peers, neighbours)
= Indirect control via relationships / peer pressure
 - Various institutions (e.g. the media, businesses, religions etc)
= Internal control via culture / norms
 - Government / the State
= Direct control via policy / legislation / sanctions

Direct Control: An example

Social Care

A Government can decide to:

- underwrite the costs associated with providing care to the frail elderly, or
- Leave such care to the private market, or
- Leave such care to the unpaid labour of the family

In each case the decision will have a different effect on people in terms of equality and equity.



Control & Power

- What is considered socially acceptable (i.e. norms and values) will vary nationally, culturally and historically
- But norms and values reflect where in society POWER resides
- Therefore the concept of Power and how it is wielded is important when considering the reproduction of inequality

Control & Power



Guided Study Activity: Control & Power

Think about how each of the following can exert control and power over an individual.

- Family
- Partner
- The Media
- Businesses
- Religion
- Government

Feedback to your Tutor

Social Reproduction

- Sociologists have argued that social reproduction involves complex links between;

Individuals with agency

(i.e. the ability to act individually and independently), and

The wider social environment

(i.e. systems and structures which can exert control and power)

- This connection between the individual and the influences on them has been called **habitus**

Two Important Terms

- AGENCY: an individual's ability to act or choose
- STRUCTURE: the social system or the social hierarchy determines (or causes) people's actions

(Gilbert, 2011, 14).

What is 'habitus'?

Habitus has been described as;

'The durable motivations, perceptions and forms of knowledge that people carry around in their heads as a result of living in particular social environments and that predispose them to act in certain ways.'

(Bourdieu, *cited in* Layder (1997), p. 236)



Paraphrasing exercise: What is this statement saying?

Habitus

- Reflects the way in which individuals' social backgrounds are represented in their mental make-up and general orientation to the world
- This allows them to deal with situations as they arise in terms of their own personal styles and biographies
 - Not just following social structures and systems
 - Not just subjective intention
- Habitus allows improvisation within the limits set by their social environments

Marxist Explanations

- the structure of the capitalist economy takes precedence over human action or agency
- capitalism requires people to take on different work roles
 - thus different sets of skills, knowledge, and dispositions
- which are valued differently
 - i.e. receive different levels of wages
- Creates a reserve labour force
 - skilled and unskilled unemployment
- Which keeps wages low
 - for capitalists' profit

(Robotham, 2005, p.14).

Marxist Explanations:

What is the role of schools?

- Bowles and Gintis (1976, p.9) say that schools are training young people for their future economic and occupational position according to their current social class position

Functionalist explanations

Functionalists argue that:

- social inequality is necessary for the survival of any society or for any small or large organization.
- It is argued that without this inequality, division of labour would be difficult (not everyone can be team captain).
- It is also argued that to attract people to both the important and less important roles there must be variation in rewards that motivates individuals to make the effort needed to gain the top positions.

The concept of 'meritocracy'

- Functionalists assert that unequal pay encourages people to work harder in order to gain financial reward
- This leads to increased 'social mobility'
- That is to say that people can move into different classes or groups by dint of hard work
- Thus it is argued that people rise in society due to 'merit' and that society is a meritocracy

The Theory of Meritocracy

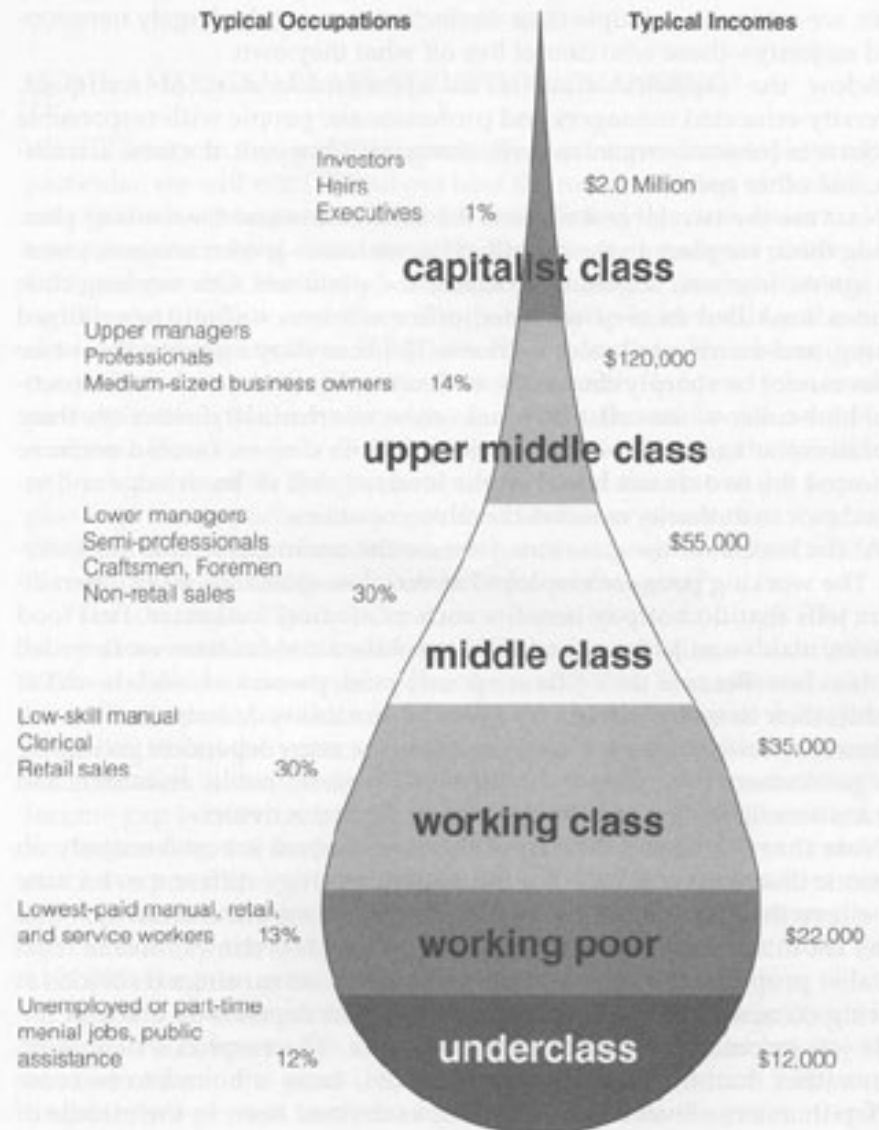
- Young (1958 *cited in* Lareau & Conley, 2008, p.93) coined the phrase Meritocracy in the 1950s
- He defined it as IQ plus effort (i.e. ability + hard work)
- MacLeod (*cited in* Mehan *et al*, 1999, p. 204) calls it the achievement ideology
- It can be summarised as the belief that people can (and in some people's minds, should) get on in society if they have effort and merit

But.....

- Is meritocracy 'value free'?
- Is meritocracy 'fair'?
- Does meritocracy support 'equality'?

- From the perspective of meritocracy
- What explains why someone is at the top of the economic structure?
- At the bottom?

FIGURE 1-1 Gilbert-Kahl Model of the Class Structure



Cultural and Linguistic Capital

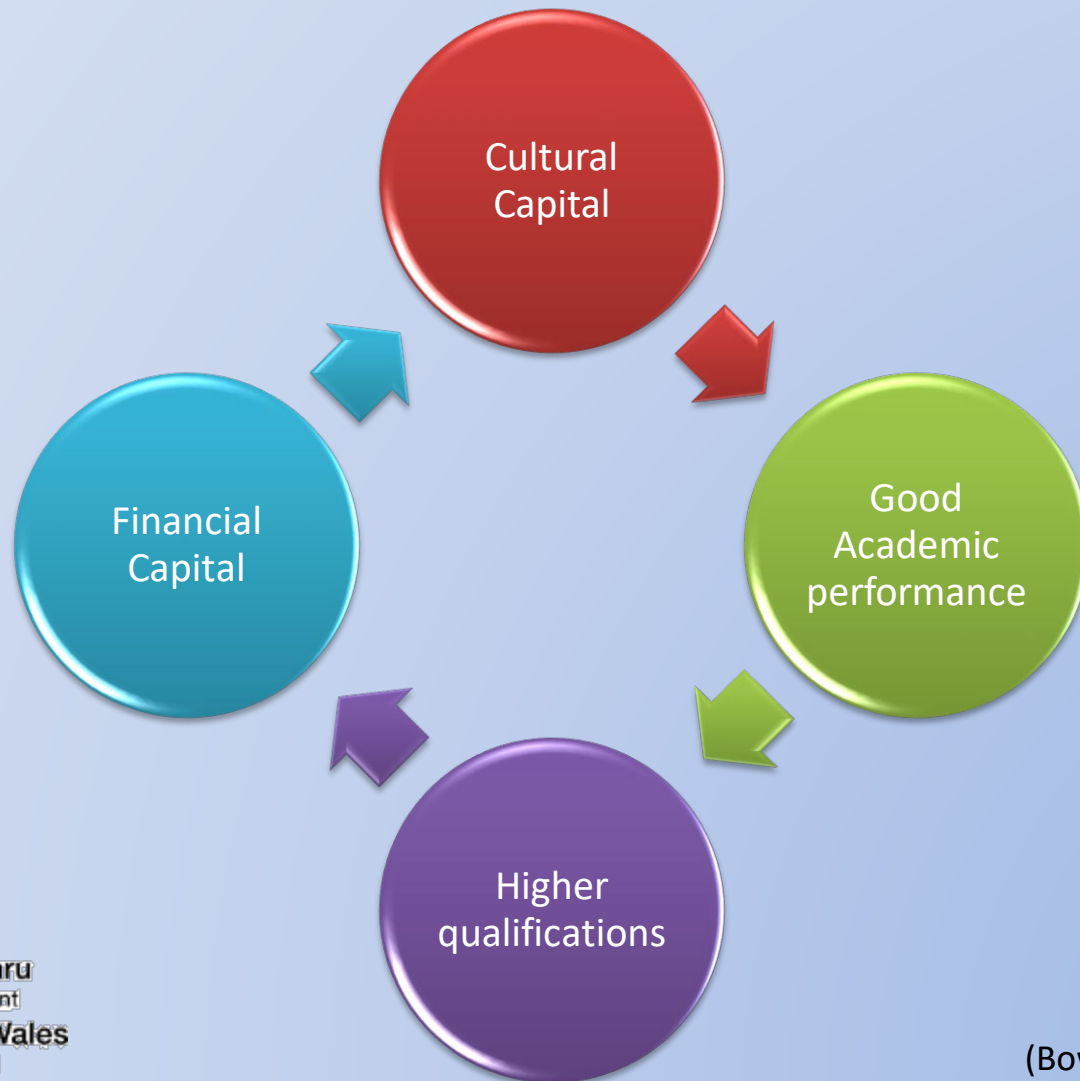
- Bourdieu (1984) argues that each class or group has its own;
 - Cultural background
 - Knowledge
 - Dispositions and tastes
- These are transmitted through the family and other 'structures'
- Which brings us back to 'habitus'
- So called because these factors are 'deeply routinized' (i.e. they become habits)
- And therefore seem to be perfectly 'natural' ways of thinking and behaving.

Cultural and Linguistic Capital: The Role of Schools

- The cultural capital of the dominant group in society
 - holding the most power and wealth
 - becomes the knowledge that is most valued in schools
- To possess that cultural capital means
 - one is considered educated
 - or smart or talented (i.e., having merit)

(Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p.9)

Cultural and Linguistic Capital and the reproduction of inequality



Social Reproduction: The Role of Schools

In other words;

- Schools look like they are neutral in evaluating students
- But because the knowledge and dispositions
- Their value system corresponds to the cultural capital of the dominant group
- Students from that class perform better in schools
- Schools require cultural resources with which only some students are endowed.
- Schools therefore legitimate social reproduction

Resistance Theory

- Student resistance to school is a political response to oppression and limited life chances
- Students do not believe that a high school diploma is going to help them do well
- This theory thus highlights agency:
 - people are able to act, interpret and have some power in their lives *in response* to structures

Social Reproduction

*This video gives a further explanation of
social reproduction and Bourdieu's
theories*

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-1vmvNuO0E&feature=player_detailpage

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