



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Trawsnewid Addysg, Trawsnewid Bywydau
Transforming Education, Transforming Lives

ECAY4004:
Agency, Empowerment and Anti-oppressive Practice
Theoretical Perspectives of Oppression
2024



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Session Outcomes:

- An understanding to inequality and the societal viewpoint of equality:
 - Social Reproduction Theory
 - The Gilbert Khal Model
 - Classism; A Marxist Viewpoint





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What is Inequality?

Types of Inequality

Inequality refers to the

- Unequal distribution of valued resources (capital)
- Unequal distribution of valued opportunities in society
- Unequal distribution of power in society

It is multidimensional concept including disparities of

- Income
- Wealth
- Prestige
- Power
- Access
- Opportunity

Equality of Opportunity

- Equal access to the chance of obtaining society's prizes on the basis of:
 - Merit
 - rather than Social Background
 - E.g. good education, decent income, healthy life etc.

Inequality of Opportunity

- Unequal access to the chance of obtaining society's prices
 - Owing to
 - Social Background

Equality of Condition

- Refers to equal access to society's prizes for everyone,
 - Irrespective of
 - Social Background
 - or Merit

Inequality of Condition

- Refers to unequal access to society's prizes
 - Owing to
 - Social Background
 - or Merit

Social Reproduction of Inequality

- The process involved in
 - Maintaining people position in society
 - and
 - Reproducing people position in society
- Specifically the labouring population,
 - and their labour power
 - on a daily (intra)
 - and generational basis (inter)

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

Social Reproduction

- Involves provision of and access to:
 - Food
 - Clothing
 - Shelter
 - Basic safety
 - Health care
 - Jobs
 - Leisure
- Alongside the development and transmission of:
 - Knowledge
 - Social values & norms
 - Cultural practices
 - Construction of individual and collective identities

Who's Involved in Social Reproduction?

- Social Reproduction is dynamic and includes
 - Various actors
 - Various institutions
 - E.g. states can 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

Cultural Differences

- What is considered socially acceptable (norms and values) will vary culturally and historically
 - But reflects the POWER in society
 - Including gender, race, class, ethnicity etc.

Habitus, Agency & Social Reproduction

- Links between
 - Individuals
 - Agency
 - Wider social environment
 - Systems & structures
 - Habitus
 - The durable motivations, perceptions and form so 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

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 situation as they arise in terms of their own personal styles and biographies
 - Not just following social structures and systems
 - Not just subjective intension
- Habitus allows improvisation within the limits set by their social environments

(Layder, p.237).

Example . . .

- Social class background
 - Influences one's habits and dispositions
 - As does participation in any social group
 - Such as an occupational group



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Discussion

- Let's talk about the video

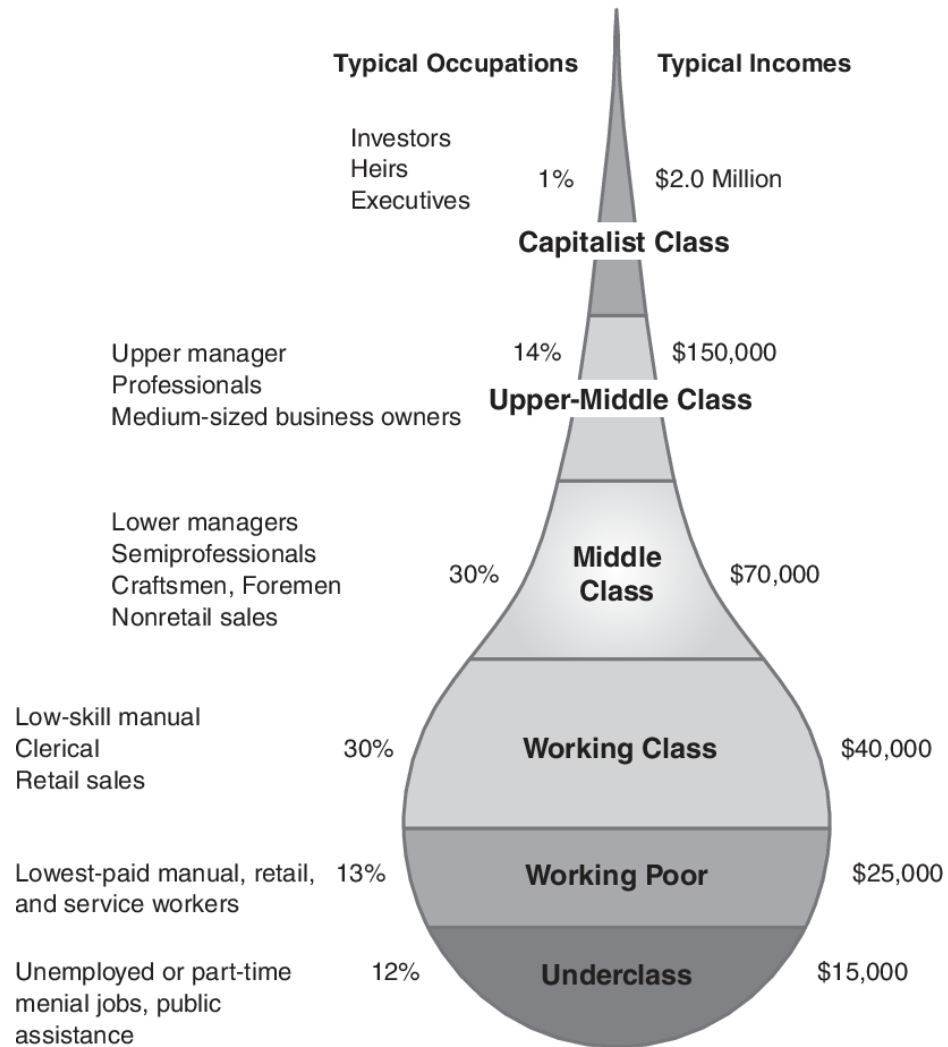
Income Inequality & Social Reproduction

- Income supports the social reproduction of inequality in society
 - Within a generation (intra)
 - Between generations (inter)
- This is called
 - Meritocracy
- And is linked to
 - Social Mobility

What is the Theory of Meritocracy?

- Young (1958 *cited in* Lareau & Conley, 2008, p.93) coined the phrase Meritocracy in the 1950s
 - IQ plus Effort
- MacLeod (*cited in* Mehan *et al*, 1999, p. 204) calls it the achievement ideology
 - People can, and in some peoples' minds should, get on in this world if they have
 - Effort
 - Merit (ability)
- Is meritocracy 'value free'?
- Is meritocracy 'fair'?
- Does meritocracy support 'equality'?

Gilbert Kahl Model



(Gilbert, 2011, 14).



From the perspective of meritocracy



What explains why someone is at the top of the economic structure?



At the bottom?

Two Important Terms

AGENCY:

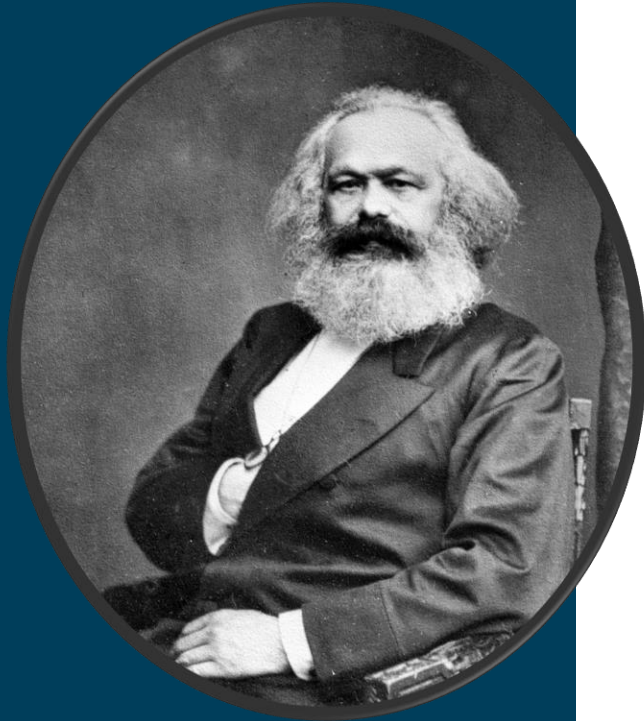
an individual's ability
to act or choose

STRUCTURE:

the social system or
the social hierarchy
determines (or
causes) people's
actions

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
 - receive different levels of wages
- A reserve labor force
 - both skilled and unskilled
- Keeps wages low
 - for capitalists' profit



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

Cultural and Linguistic Capital

Each class has its own

- Cultural background
- Knowledge
- Dispositions
- and tastes
- that are transmitted through the family

(Bourdieu 1984)

This is called the *habitus*

- to signal its deep routinization
- Naturalness
- and embedding within a person's body
- language, and tastes

(Bowles and Gintis, 1976, p.9)



Cultural and Linguistic Capital: The Role of Schools

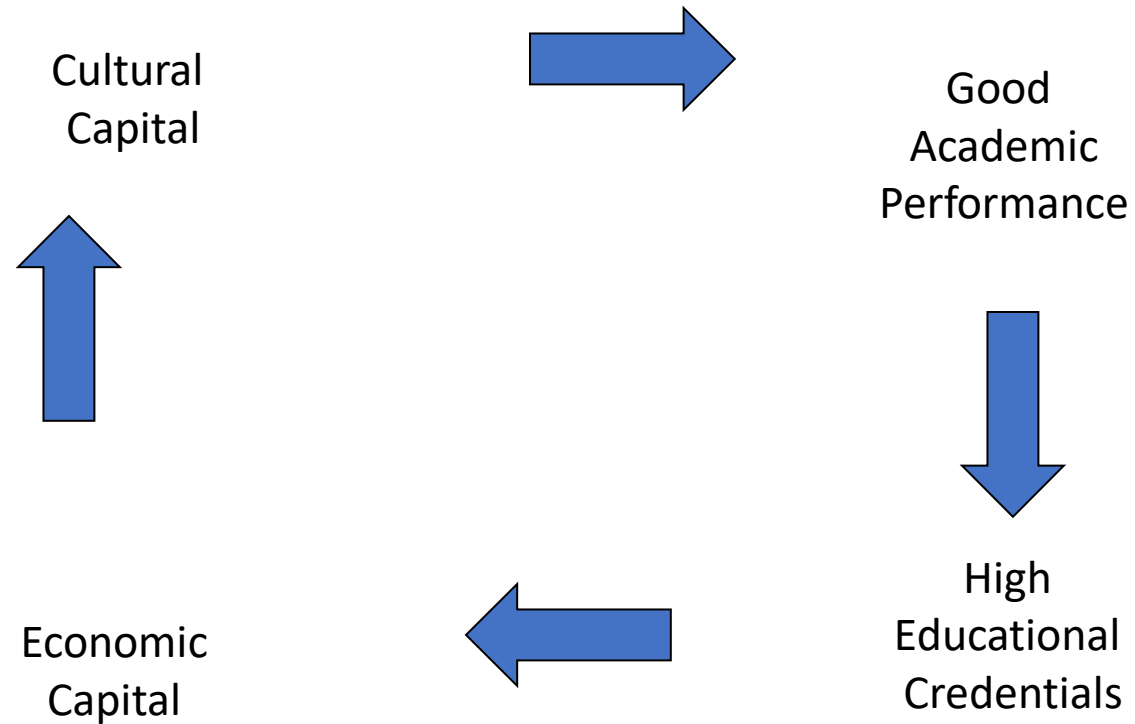
The cultural capital of the dominant group in society

- 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)

Cultural and Linguistic Capital



Cultural and Linguistic Capital: 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

Discussion

- Discuss your thought son the concepts learnt today.

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