



Social Stratification

Part II

The division of society into distinct social classes is one of the most striking manifestations of the modern world ... It has often been the source of other kinds of inequality and ... the economic dominance of a particular class has very often been the basis for its political rule.

TB Bottomor



What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Max Weber

- Structural functional theorists see function, not conflict, as the basis of stratification.
- Weber held that social standing consists of three parts or dimensions: **property** (comes in many forms: buildings, land, animals, machinery, cars, stocks, bonds, businesses, furniture, jewelry, bank accounts), **power** (ability to carry out your will despite resistance), and **prestige** (respect or regard people give to various occupations and accomplishments).
- **Wealth** consists of the total amount of money and valuable goods that a person or family controls. It is more unequally distributed than **income** (occupational wages or salaries and earnings from investments).



What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Max Weber

- **Education** can lead to income attainment but the benefits are not equally shared by racial/ethnic minorities or by women.
- **Occupation** serves as a key source of social prestige since we commonly evaluate each other according to what we do. Because there are so many specific occupations, sociologists often categorize occupations into a smaller number.
 - **white-collar**: professional, manager, administrator, technical, clerical
 - **blue-collar**: craft, precision production, repair, operator, laborer, farm worker

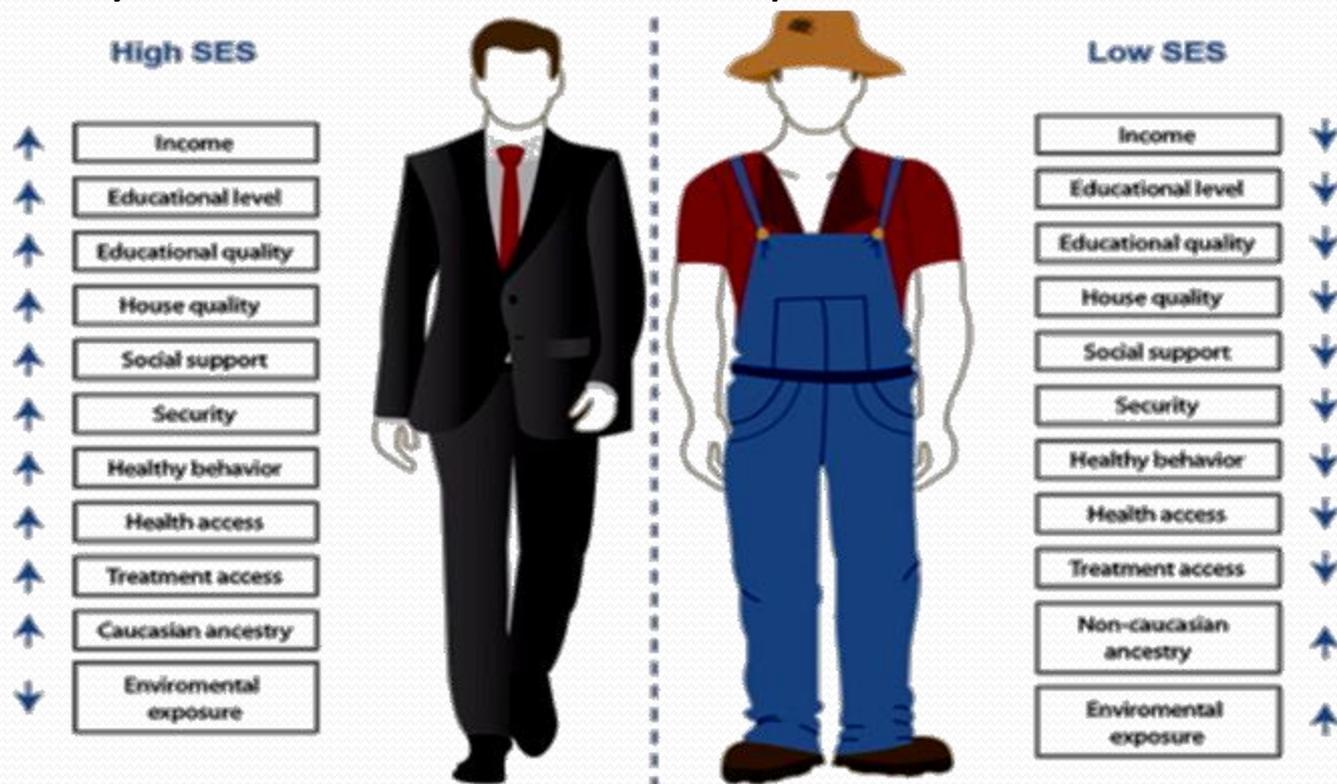




What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Max Weber

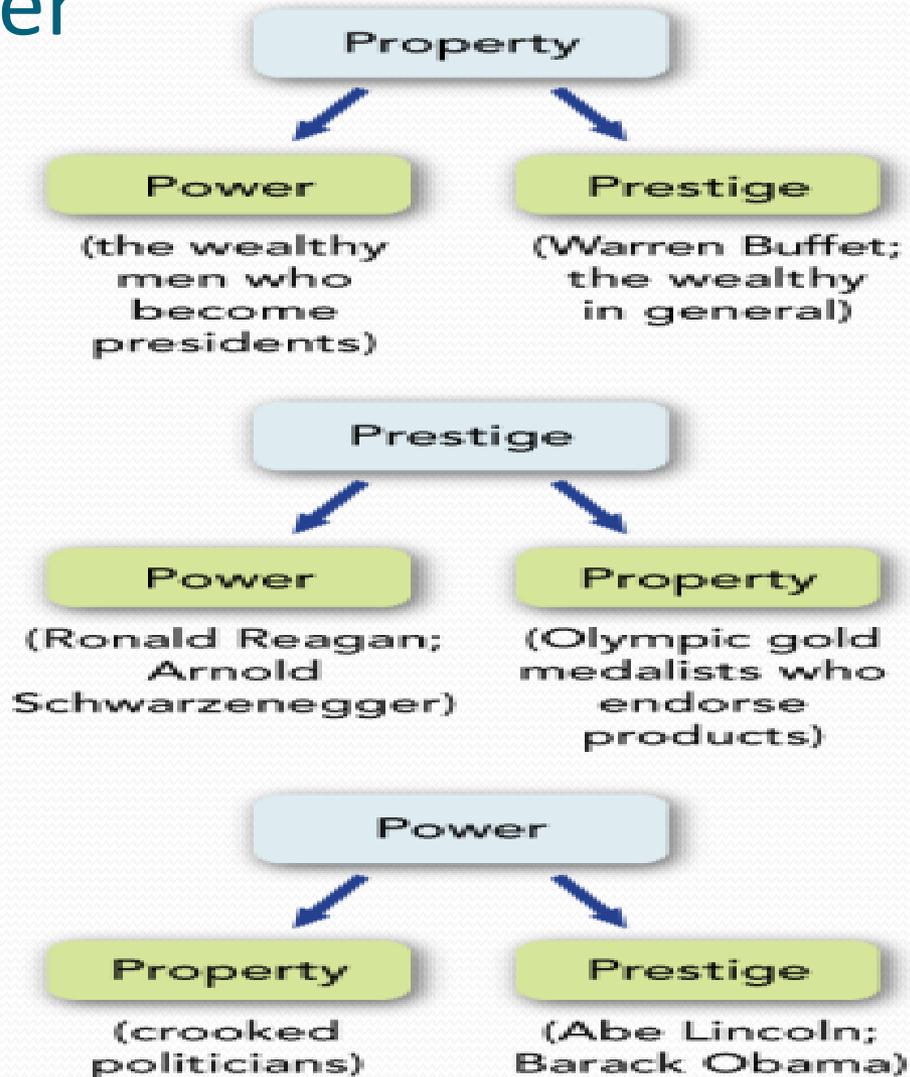
- Many sociologists use the term **socioeconomic status (SES)**: a composite ranking based on various dimensions of social inequality such as education, occupation, income.





What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Max Weber





What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Davis-Moore

- Kingsley Davis and Wilbert E. Moore hypothesized that social stratification is a universal pattern because it has **beneficial consequences for the operation of society**.
- Society must make sure all positions are filled.
- Some positions are more important than others.
- More important positions are filled by more qualified people.
- To motivate qualified people, they must be rewarded.
- Societies become more productive as they approach **meritocracy**: a system of social stratification based on personal merit.



What is the Basis of Social Stratification? Davis-Moore



1. Jobs whose skills are more scarce or jobs that are most important for the functioning of society are given more rewards

2. People compete vigorously for these high reward jobs

3. The most talented people fill the most important positions for society



What is the Basis of Social Stratification?

Davis-Moore

- criticisms of Davis-Moore
 - How do we know which positions most are important? It is difficult to specify the functional importance of a given occupation. Some are over/under rewarded (baseball player, entertainer, teacher, garbage collector).
 - Stratification ought to benefit everyone. Davis-Moore ignore how social stratification can prevent the development of individual talents.
 - Davis-Moore ignore how social inequality may promote conflict and revolution (*instability*).



How do elites maintain stratification?

- Social stratification is maintained within a society by elites who control ideas and information, maintain social networks, and use force. Ruling elite...
 - develop ideologies that justify system
 - dominate major social institutions
 - control information and ideas
 - socialize members into accepting their proper places
 - propagate belief that everyone's welfare depends on keeping society stable





How do elites maintain stratification?

- ideology: beliefs about the way things ought to be that justify social arrangements
 - example: In the Estate System, why didn't peasants rebel and take over land for themselves? Believed King's authority comes from God (ideology of divine right).
- The elite in every society develop ideologies to help justify their position at the top.
- Ideologies also control the elite, who must conform to certain ideals.
 - example: Pakistani leaders are expected to conform to fundamentalist Islamic beliefs.



How do elites maintain stratification?

- Control of ideas and information can be more effective than the use of force and is used by elites to maintain their positions of power.
- example: Dictators may imprison or torture journalists.
- In democracies, elites try to control the release of information by leaking stories or withholding them.
- Social networks are also critical in maintaining social stratification because they supply valuable information and tend to perpetuate social inequality.





How do elites maintain stratification?

- Technology helps the elite maintain their positions.
 - It's easier for elites to monitor citizens' activities with new technologies.
 - Technology also makes it more difficult for elites to control information.
- Underlying the maintenance of stratification is **control of social institutions** such as the legal establishment, the police and the military.



Comparative Social Stratification: Great Britain



- Like other industrialized countries, Great Britain has a **class system** that can be divided into lower, middle and upper classes. The population is about evenly divided between the middle class and the lower (or working) class. A tiny upper class, perhaps 1% of the population, is wealthy, powerful and highly educated.
- The most striking characteristics are language and education.
- **Accent and distinctive speech** has a powerful impact on British life. As soon as someone speaks, the listener is aware of that person's social order and treats him or her accordingly.



Comparative Social Stratification: Great Britain

- The most striking characteristics are language and education.
- Education is the primary way by which the British perpetuate their class system from one generation to the next. Almost all children go to neighborhood schools but the richest 5% send their children to exclusive private boarding schools (**public schools**).
- More recently economist [Mike Savage](#) divided the British population into seven classes: elite, established middle class, technical middle class, new affluent workers, traditional working class, emergent service workers and precariat (poorest and most deprived).



Comparative Social Stratification: Former Soviet Union

- Stratification was based on **unequal job categories** and power lay with the **political elite**.
- Characterized by self-perpetuation and limited mobility.
- Access to higher education, a prerequisite to political and social advancement, was constrained.
- Despite Marxist-Leninist notions of a classless society, the Soviet Union had a powerful ruling class, the **nomenklatura**: party officials and key personnel in the government and other important sectors such as heavy industry.





Comparative Social Stratification: Former Soviet Union

- Soviet ruling class
 - Nomenklatura enjoyed privileges such as roomy apartments, country dachas and access to special stores, schools, medical facilities and recreational sites.
 - Social status and income increased as members were promoted to higher positions in the party.
- **proletariat** (urban working class): generally lived in cramped apartment complexes, spent hours each day standing in line to buy food and other necessities, attended frequent obligatory sessions of political indoctrination



Comparative Social Stratification: Former Soviet Union

- **peasantry** (agricultural workers): constituted the bottom layer of Soviet society, eked out a meager existence with little opportunity for relief, received the least pay and the least opportunity for social advancement
- **Post-communist Russia is characterized by a wide disparity in wealth and privilege.** Although there is no rigid class structure, social stratification based on wealth is evident and growing, and social mobility has decreased.





Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- US society is **highly stratified** but many underestimate the extent of **structural inequality** in US society.
 - Power and education are unequally distributed based on ancestry, race, gender, etc.
- Class, race and gender interact to produce a person's place in US society, the manner in which he/she is treated and his/her self-identify.
- It is not necessarily the impact of any one variable in US society that leads to stratification. It is a **unique combination of stratification-related factors** that determines how one succeeds in society.



Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- Some traits are within our control ... others we have little control over (achieved vs. ascribed).
- major **achieved** social stratifiers: education, income, occupation, religion
- major **ascribed** social stratifiers: race, sex, age
- Achieved stratifiers are those traits that affect our position in the social hierarchy and over which we have *some* degree of control.





Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- Sociologists usually conceptualize American society as consisting either of 3 or 9 distinct social classes.
 - In the three-class model, society is divided into a lower class, a middle class and an upper class.
 - In the nine-class model, each of these classes is further divided into three subclasses: lower lower, middle lower, upper lower, etc.



Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- **upper upper class:** elite families with great wealth who dominate the economic system of US
 - Elite status is ascribed and many are friends who have been socialized into an upper-class world.
- **lower upper class:** people who have recently achieved success and wealth but whose lack of an established family name may preclude them from full acceptance into the upper-upper class





Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- **upper middle class:** upper third of the middle class, a group that consists mostly of professionals and others with well-paying, respected occupations
- Collectively **exerts power** because its members participate in political affairs and support various causes but they do not have as much direct access to powerful individuals, nor do they have the time and the wealth for extensive political activity.
- **lower middle class:** less educated and have relatively few assets



Comparative Social Stratification: United States



- **upper lower class (working class):** service personnel, semiskilled operatives and other blue-collar workers who do not earn enough to accumulate substantial savings ... **vulnerable to disruptions in their income**
- **lower lower class:** lack education and live in the most dilapidated sections of the community and in substandard housing
 - **working poor:** have jobs but simply cannot earn an adequate income
 - **chronically poor:** mostly unemployed or work only occasionally



Gilbert-Kahl Model of the US Class Structure

Social Class	Education	Occupation	Income	Percentage of Population
Capitalist	Prestigious university	Investors and heirs, a few top executives	\$1,000,000+	1%
Upper Middle	College or university, often with postgraduate study	Professionals and upper managers	\$125,000+	15%
Lower Middle	High school or college; often apprenticeship	Semiprofessionals and lower managers, craftspeople, foremen	About \$60,000	34%
Working	High school	Factory workers, clerical workers, low-paid retail sales, and craftspeople	About \$36,000	30%
Working Poor	High school and some high school	Laborers, service workers, low-paid salespeople	About \$19,000	15%
Underclass	Some high school	Unemployed and part-time, on welfare	Under \$12,000	5%

Figures are a bit dated.



Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- poverty in the US
 - **relative poverty**: people are poor only in comparison to others ... there will always be some group at the bottom of the hierarchy
 - **absolute poverty**: inability of people to maintain a certain standard of living ... a deprivation of resources that is life threatening
- The US poverty rate tends to vary from about 11% to 15%. Some fall into poverty while others climb out so that **at some point in their lives one-fourth of all people in the US will be poor**. Most Americans will spend at least one year below the poverty line at some point between ages 25 and 75.



Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- explanations of poverty
 - **culture of poverty**: the poor are primarily responsible for their own poverty ... Some sociologists believe that the culture of poverty "blames the poor" for their plight when, in fact, the causes of poverty lie in society.
 - **societal responsibility**: Most evidence suggests that society rather than the individual is responsible for poverty.
 - **the feminization of poverty**: the trend by which women represent an increasing proportion of the poor





Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- explanations of poverty
- societal responsibility
 - the working poor
 - the truly disadvantaged: live predominantly in the inner city and are trapped in a cycle of joblessness, deviance, crime, welfare dependency and unstable family life
 - William Wilson argues that poor economic conditions are the main problems facing the truly disadvantaged.
 - Other sociologists note that only some people drift into a life of dependency or deviance because they cannot find work.





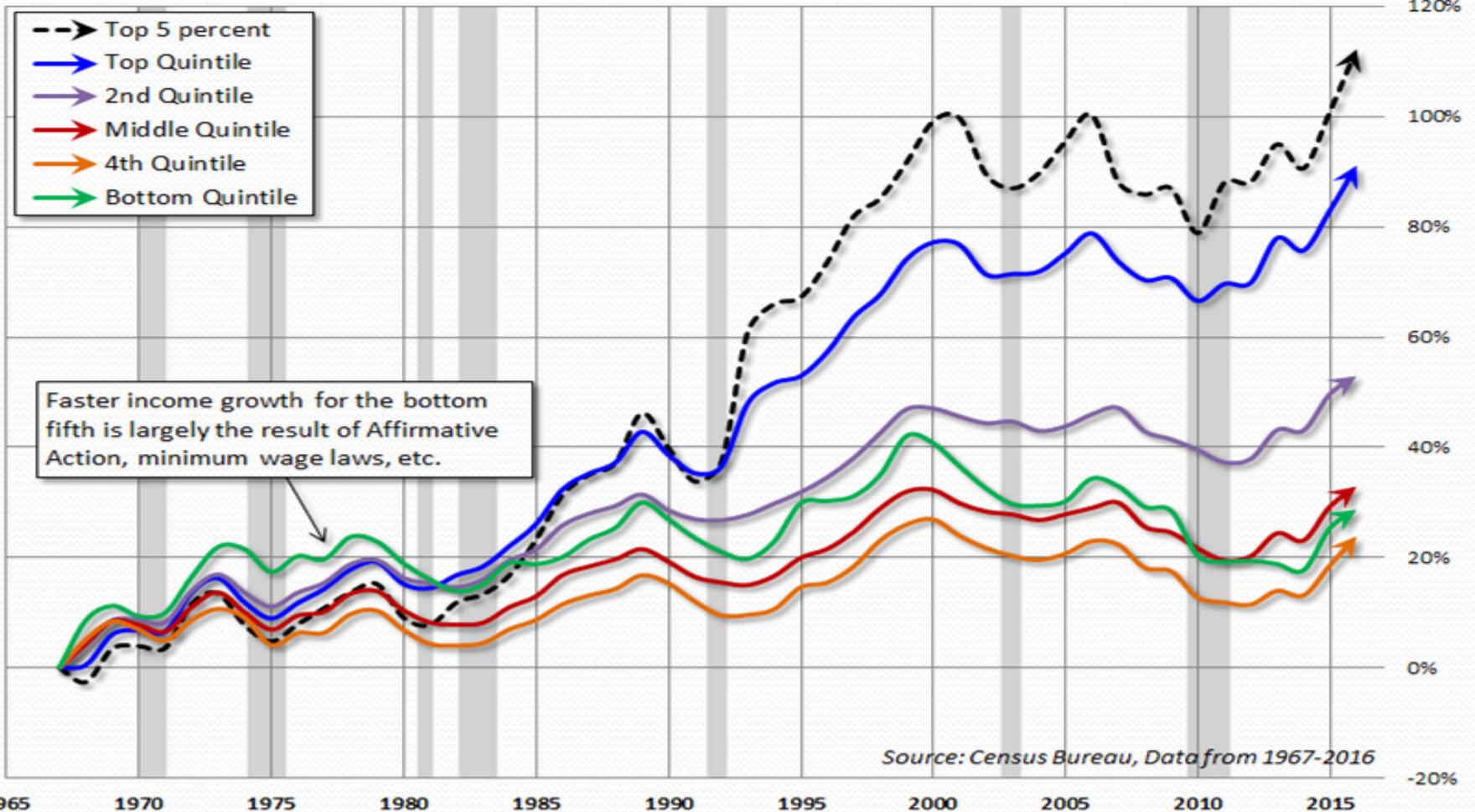
Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- Social mobility among US men has been high.
- Within a single generation, social mobility is usually **incremental**, not dramatic.
- Long-term trend in US social mobility has been upward.
- Short-term trend has been stagnation and greater income polarization.
 - For many workers, earnings have stalled and the number holding multiple jobs is up.
 - An increasing number of jobs offer little income.
 - Young people are remaining at home longer due to an inability to afford an independent lifestyle.



Real Mean US Household Income Cumulative Growth by Quintile, 1965-2015

With Recessions Highlighted



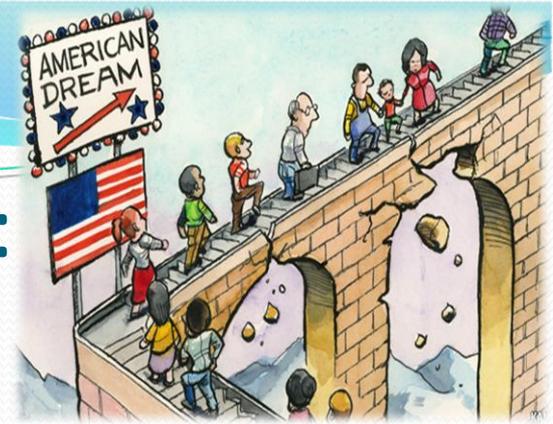


Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- Is the American Dream available to all?
 - Theoretically, it is available to all, native-born Americans as well as immigrants.
 - It is easier for some to attain than others.
 - Quality education remains an important avenue to success or the lack of it in the US.
 - Savage Inequalities (3:33)
 - White males have the easiest time. They have more institutional support for their ambitions, and society expects more from them than from others. They are more likely to receive help from people who want them to succeed.



Comparative Social Stratification: United States



- Is the American Dream available to all?
 - Affirmative action and anti-discrimination legislation can help women and minorities succeed but policies cannot overcome all resistance.
 - Glass ceilings prevent women from reaching the highest echelons of business.
 - Racism and a racist caste system often prevent ethnic minorities from reaching their potential.
 - Women and minorities have achieved success in some areas of American life. If it's possible for some, it is possible for others, even if some face greater difficulties.



Comparative Social Stratification: United States

- [Shadowy Lines That Still Divide](#) (figures are a little dated but concepts are excellent)
- [How Class Works](#) (interactive graphic)
- [Rise in US Inequality](#)
- [The Geography of a Recession](#) (0:41)
- [The Spiral of Inequality](#) (figures are a little dated but concepts are excellent)



Social Stratification and the Global Status of Females

- Gender is the basis for stratification in every society in the world.
- patriarchy: male dominance in a society
- Men have had, and continue to have, more physical and social power and status than women, especially in the public arena.
- Inequality has been a special problem in the areas of higher education, work and politics.

Two thirds of the global illiterate population are women





Social Stratification and the Global Status of Females

- Behind much of the inequalities seen in education, the workplace and politics is **sexism**: prejudice and discrimination because of gender.
- Fundamental to sexism is the assumption that men are superior to women.
- Sexism produces inequality between the genders, particularly in the form of discrimination.
- Sexism has also caused women to feel inferior to men, or to rate themselves negatively.





The End



all animals are equal,
BUT SOME ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS.
GEORGE ORWELL, ANIMAL FARM